POLICY Review

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 1999, NO.96

THE CULTURE WAR THAT ISN'T
JEREMY RABKIN

THE QUADRENNIAL FEAR OF IDEAS
DANIEL CASSE

HELMUT KOHL, GIANT
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A USER'S GUIDE TO POLITICS
HERBERT E. MEYER

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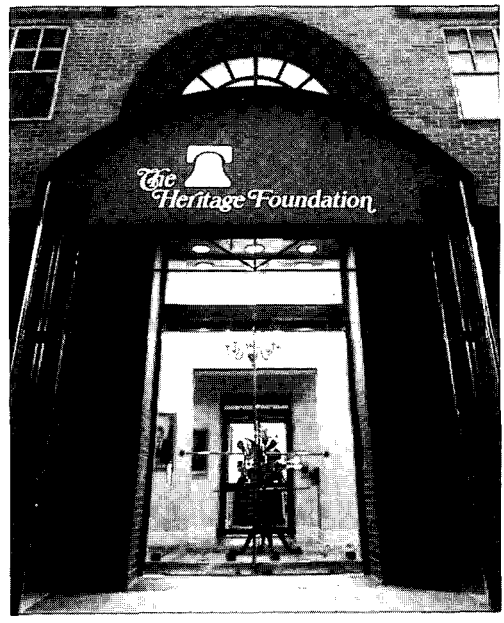

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POLICY *Review*

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Policy Review (ISSN 0146-5945) is published bimonthly by The Heritage Foundation, a research and educational institute that formulates and promotes conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. For more information, write The Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002 or visit www.heritage.org. Periodicals postage paid at Washington DC and additional mailing offices.

The opinions expressed in *Policy Review* are those of the authors and editors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Heritage Foundation.

Policy Review is designed by Mitzi Hamilton for Bird-in-Hand Productions.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES: Address letters to *Policy Review*, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002-4999. Telephone: 202-546-4400. Fax: 202-608-6136. Email: polrev@heritage.org. Internet site: www.policyreview.com. Direct advertising and reprint inquiries to Leslie Gardner. Reproduction of editorial content without permission is prohibited.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION: Contact *Policy Review*, Subscriptions Department, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002-4999, or call toll-free 1-800-566-9449. Foreign subscribers call 202-608-6161. For address changes (allow six weeks), provide old and new address, including ZIP codes. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Policy Review*, Subscriptions Department, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002-4999. Subscription rates: one year, $36; two years, $72; three years, $108. Add $10 per year for foreign delivery. U.S.A. newsstand distribution by Eastern News, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Route 250, Milan OH 44846-9705. For newsstand inquiries, call 1-800-221-3148.

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The Culture War That Isn't

By JEREMY RABKIN

IS AMERICA IN THE GRIP of a bitter culture war? Quite a few people seem to think so. And for some of them, the events of the past year prove that conservatives are losing it, perhaps decisively and irretrievably.

Here, to cite the most prominent example, was the despairing reaction of Paul Weyrich, long-time conservative activist, after the Senate acquitted President Clinton on impeachment charges: "If there really were a moral majority out there, Bill Clinton would have been driven out of office months ago." From this premise, Weyrich proceeded to still more despairing reflections in a widely circulated letter to supporters last February: "I believe that we probably have lost the culture war. . . . in terms of society in general, we have lost." "Our culture," he went on to charge, "has decayed into something approaching barbarism"; as for the country, it "is very close to becoming a state totally dominated by an alien ideology, an ideology bitterly hostile to Western culture." The proper response, as Weyrich saw it, was a withdrawal from public campaigns — in effect, a kind of cultural secession: "we have to look at what we can do to separate ourselves from this hostile culture. . . . We need some sort of quarantine."

To be sure, many conservatives, while sharing Weyrich's dismay at the public reaction to the Clinton scandals, shrink from pursuing his bitter logic to the same apocalyptic conclusions. At the same time, few have thought to quarrel with the premises on which those conclusions are based: that the past several decades have been characterized by a sweeping struggle pitting the forces of liberalism and progressivism, on one hand, against those of religious orthodoxy and tradition on the other; that this conflict, more than any other single force, has shaped the domestic politics of our time on every level; that we are, in short, in the throes of a "culture war," whether we choose to remain in the field or, following Weyrich and others, declare defeat and get out. To most conservatives, and indeed to many liberals, this

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way of interpreting our recent history now seems simply beyond argument.

It isn't. As historical description, the notion of a "culture war" is a gross distortion. As a guide to contemporary strategists, it is a needless counsel of despair.

Anatomy of a metaphor

THE TERM "CULTURE WAR" itself, as applied to American politics, did not gain wide currency until the 1990s. What pushed it into circulation were the events of the preceding decade — in particular, the siege mentality generated by the disappointment of higher hopes in the Reagan years.

In the early 1980s, a lot of religious conservatives thought of themselves as the new winners in American politics, the leaders of a newly mobilized majority. A few years earlier, Weyrich himself had approached television evangelist Jerry Falwell with an idea for a new organization that would mobilize evangelical Christians, unite them with conservative Catholics and Jews, and establish a powerful new voice in American politics. Weyrich, raised a Catholic, was the person who suggested the name "Moral Majority" as a way of bridging sectarian divisions and emphasizing the common moral principles that seemed so much under attack in the 1960s and '70s. Falwell, for his part, had little experience in politics. But like Weyrich, he had seen the potential for political mobilization of his audience. Harnessing this latent constituency and broadening its appeal seemed to be a plausible way of changing the direction of national politics.

The new organization chose its targets strategically. The Moral Majority called for the restoration of prayer in public schools — a venture with overwhelming popular approval, at least according to opinion polls. It called for the renewal of restraints on pornography — another winner, according to polls. And it also emphasized the need for restraints on abortion, picking up on a concern long championed by the Catholic Church but one in which evangelical Protestants had not previously been very active. On all of these issues, the Moral Majority could cast itself as the voice of a latent majority, resisting policies imposed by judicial edict at the behest of liberal elites.

At first, the strategy seemed to be working. In the 1980 elections, particularly, the Moral Majority was widely credited with helping to elect Ronald Reagan and a contingent of new conservative senators, several of whom won their seats by defeating famous liberal politicians (including George McGovern). As it turned out, however, neither Congress nor the Reagan administration invested much energy in the Moral Majority's agenda, while the organization itself was bitterly denounced by political opponents as a fomenter of intolerance and divisiveness. By Reagan's second term, Falwell decided that the very name of his organization had become a political liability. After briefly trying to run it under the neutral name "Liberty

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Foundation," he rolled up the operation altogether after the 1988 elections.

By then, the political isolation of religious conservatives also seemed to be driven home by the pathetic showing of another TV evangelist, the Rev. Pat Robertson, when he sought the Republican presidential nomination in 1988 and failed to win a single primary. Robertson subsequently tried to salvage something from past political mobilizations by organizing a new organization, the Christian Coalition. Its new executive director, Ralph Reed, summed up the lesson of past experience when he said, "We know that we are *not* the majority."

From the recognition that religious conservatives were a minority, it was only a short further step to the conclusion that they were a hopelessly besieged minority, engaged in a struggle for survival with implacable foes. The idea that this struggle amounted to a "culture war" with liberals was given particular currency in the early 1990s by James Davison Hunter's book of that name. Hunter, a sociologist at the University of Virginia, made the plausible point that sectarian differences between Protestants and Catholics (and Jews) had receded in importance and were now eclipsed by divisions that ran across denominational lines between those with an "orthodox" view of the world and those with a "progressive" view. The progressives, he insisted, were systematically stigmatizing and marginalizing those of orthodox views, while the latter responded with increasing resentment and belligerence.

It was only a short further step to the conclusion that they were a hopelessly besieged minority.

Hunter's follow-up book had the alarmist title *Before the Shooting Begins* and tried to make the case for respectful accommodations between the belligerent forces in the "culture war" — before divisions culminated in real violence. Conservatives who demurred from these darker forebodings (like those who demurred from Weyrich's declaration of defeat) nevertheless were prone to embrace the metaphor on which they were premised. By the mid-1990s or so, the "culture war" had become a ubiquitous description of reality among political and religious conservatives, whether or not they were familiar with its origin.

Protestant, Catholic, Jew

JUST HOW UBIQUITOUS Hunter's metaphor has become can be seen in the examples of three recent books by religious conservatives, all of which attempt to take the long view of the state (and fate) of religion in America. Though they go off in quite different directions, each starts from the shared recognition that dangerous cultural forces seem to have gained ascendancy in American life.

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The book that has received the most public attention is *Blinded by Might*, co-authored by Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson. Both worked under the Rev. Jerry Falwell in the early 1980s, when Falwell was organizing the Moral Majority. Like Paul Weyrich, Thomas and Dobson believe that the religious right has largely failed in its effort to redirect the path of American culture. In some ways, they are no more optimistic than Weyrich. The subtitle of the book poses a question: "Can the Religious Right Save America?" The general answer of the book is no — at least not by politics.

Thomas, for his part (the authors speak in their own voices in alternating sections), decries the "aphrodisiac of political power" and the vain delusions that seduced the founders of the Moral Majority. It began with the seeming triumphs of the 1980 election: "The election was proof that God was on our side. . . . Victory and success, money and access to the White House, to Congress, and to the media — this was all the proof we needed of God's approval and blessing." Two decades later, says a humbled Thomas, "the moral landscape of America has become worse. . . . We failed because we were unable to redirect a nation from the top down. Real change must come from the bottom up or better yet, from the inside out."

Thomas and Dobson preach a return to what they insist is the true Christian vocation.

Thus Thomas and Dobson preach a return to what they insist is the true Christian vocation — preaching the gospel and setting a good example. That, at any rate, is the positive aspect of their message; its negative side is a thoroughgoing disdain of politics. Dobson, now a pastor in Grand Rapids, Mich., reports that his church now avoids any form of political involvement, refusing to allow petitions "of any kind" to be distributed, refusing even to participate in voter registration drives. Having grown up in Northern Ireland and reflected much on its sectarian strife, Dobson now preaches the ancient doctrine of submission: "Submitting to government authority involves recognizing that authority is from God and then willingly and completely subjecting ourselves to that authority. . . . Submitting and honoring political leaders is especially difficult when those leaders are anti-Christian. . . . But the Bible calls for submission and honor to those who may not be like us, or — as in the case of Paul with regard to Nero — even an enemy of the Christian faith."

In *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, Kenneth Craycraft takes the argument much further. He is not just disdainful of American politics but of the American constitutional system. Craycraft holds a Ph.D. in theology from Boston College. He is not a priest but a college professor. He writes in defense of traditional Catholic thought and insists that the liberal principles of the American Constitution are irreconcilable with true Catholic teaching.

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He devotes an entire chapter to demonstrating that the attempted reconciliation, advanced in the early 1960s by John Courtney Murray's book, *We Hold These Truths*, was a conscious exercise in "irony." In Craycraft's reading, the church's actual doctrine on religious toleration, promulgated in the 1960s at the Second Vatican Council (where Father Murray played an important advisory role), is much more guarded and qualified in its acceptance of religious toleration. The true Catholic understanding of religious freedom, Craycraft insists, is "the freedom of the Church" and not "freedom for error." Liberal doctrine, by contrast, extends freedom to private religious sects only on the prior understanding that none reflects binding truth — a claim liberal doctrine necessarily (and quite undeservedly, in Craycraft's view) arrogates to itself.

Craycraft's argument, of course, places him far afield of mainstream American Catholic thought. Radical as it is, however (to say nothing of angry and contentious), his book is in many ways a rather scholarly, serious, and cogently argued exposition. It expresses an outlook that has rarely been heard in America but was once widely trumpeted in Europe, and not all that long ago. And it leads to a conclusion somewhat akin to Weyrich's — that faithful Catholics have no stake in upholding an American constitutional system that is, at its very roots, corrupt.

Much like Thomas and Dobson, Craycraft calls on true Christians to cultivate their own separate gardens.

Craycraft does not call for the imposition of a Catholic state in America but for the recognition by Catholics — and perhaps others of what he vaguely refers to as "orthodox faith" — that they have no stake in the existing order. "The only definition of religious liberty in American political discourse," he believes, "is one that marginalizes, if not eradicates as a significant presence, orthodox religious belief." Much like Thomas and Dobson, he calls on true Christians to cultivate their own separate gardens and turn their backs on the notion of a shared political community.

So who wants to go on fighting in the "culture war"? Ironically, it is the Orthodox rabbi, Daniel Lapin. Lapin, who was born in South Africa and ordained in England, has followed an unusual path for an American rabbi. He no longer has his own congregation and does not live in a Jewish community. He conducts a syndicated radio program and other advocacy efforts from his home on an island near Seattle. In the book and apart from it, Lapin's message is that Jews need to make common cause with conservative Christians in what he unapologetically characterizes in "culture war" terms — from his title, *America's Real War*, to the military metaphors that run through the text.

Thus, where Thomas and Dobson warn against the vain temptations of

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political prominence, Rabbi Lapin wants his readers to know that he was a featured speaker at the 1996 Republican National Convention (his book also carries endorsements from U.S. senators). Where Kenneth Craycraft decries the liberal doctrines of Locke and Jefferson, Lapin celebrates the biblical wisdom of the Founding Fathers and belabors (sometimes improbably) the parallels between biblical Israel and early America. And he does not hesitate to extend the argument to a defense of the free market (and low taxes), proudly identifying this economic program with biblical precepts. In short, in depicting America as God's country, a special home for God's faithful, Lapin embraces exactly the kind of rhetoric that Christian conservatives have had to eschew — or are told by Thomas and Dobson that they have to abandon.

It is hard to read this somewhat overwrought book without thinking of that joke mocking renegade Jewish intellectuals who allied themselves with the emerging movements of European nationalism in the nineteenth century: "Anti-Semitism was going nowhere until the Jews got into it." Rabbi Lapin seems to think that the defense of Christian America won't succeed unless the Jews get into it. In fact, great chunks of this book attack liberal Jewish groups for their reflexive hostility to conservative Christians and their eagerness to confuse Jewish religious precepts with partisan liberal politics. At times one wonders just who is being rallied here; if Lapin really intended his argument to reach a Jewish audience, he might have tried a different forum than the Christian publishing house which distributes this book. Still, it remains a curiosity that, in this season of soul searching on the right, it is an Orthodox rabbi who most insistently cries, "Onward Christian soldiers!"

Other Americas

WHAT IS PERHAPS MOST STRIKING about the prevailing defeatism among religious conservatives is its ahistorical, perhaps even anti-historical, character. It's as if the collision of religion and politics only happened yesterday. Yet since before its birth, the United States has been marked — indeed, largely formed — by the vigorous engagement in politics by believers of every description, pursuing a multiplicity of agendas.

Americans insisted on independence in religion even before they rose in rebellion to assert their political independence. In the New England colonies, founded by dissenters from the Church of England, there remained abiding suspicion of the established church at home. Even the learned and austere Jonathan Edwards protested against the missionaries sent out from London in the 1750s "to proselyte Protestant Dissenters to the Church of England, as if they imagine there can be no salvation out of that church." By the 1760s, news that the Anglican church was seeking to establish a bishop in North America provoked a fury of protest. "People have no security against

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being unmercifully priest-ridden," warned a New England pastor, "but by keeping all imperious bishops and other clergymen . . . from getting their feet into the stirrup at all."

The alarm over Anglican impositions then fed the protest against the stamp tax, which triggered the main quarrel with Parliament: "stamping and episcopizing," a British newspaper reported, were commonly regarded in the colonies as "only different branches of the same plan of power." Patriot orators hammered home the connection: "If Parliament could tax us," John Adams emphasized, "they could establish the Church of England with all its creeds, articles, tests, ceremonies and tithes; and prohibit all [local] churches as . . . schism shops." So the constitutional arguments of James Otis were regularly echoed by the non-Anglican clergy: A 1781 Tory tract on the *Origin of the American Rebellion* spoke of "Mr. Otis's black regiment, the dissenting clergy." Protestant ministers in New England preached the revolutionary cause from their pulpits in the 1770s with every bit as much fervor as Patrick Henry did in the political assemblies of Virginia.

Protestant ministers in New England preached the revolutionary cause with every bit as much fervor as Patrick Henry.

Perhaps this was no longer an orthodox Christianity. It did not emphasize submission to civil authority or even to religious authority. It was, on the contrary, eager to link religious liberty and civil liberty as twin principles of God's providential plan. As Ezra Stiles put it in a sermon at the end of the Revolutionary War, "liberty, civil and religious, has sweet and attractive charms" and in holding to them, Americans could trust that "God has still greater blessings in store for this vine which his own right hand hath planted."

This outlook made the bulk of American Protestants feel entirely at peace with American institutions. But it did not make them complacent. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Americans pioneered the techniques of evangelism in a democratic age — the mass distribution of Bibles and tracts, the mass conferral of adult baptism on those "reborn," above all, the revival meeting, combining bonfires and entertainment with prayer and exhortation. Religious ferment in the decades before the Civil War helped to create an atmosphere in which startlingly new sects emerged, some of which are still gaining new adherents at a great rate today, like the Adventist churches and the Mormons.

And religious fervor then poured into a host of social reform efforts, of which the anti-slavery cause proved the most explosive. When the country was finally rent by civil war, masses of people thought they were re-enacting a biblical drama. It was not, for example, a public relations gesture by Gen. Sherman to have his troops sing, "We come to bring the Jubilee." Similarly

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evocative of the popular imagination were the righteous rhetoric of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the references to President Lincoln as "Father Abraham."

Both before and after the Civil War, therefore, efforts to organize public schools — or "common schools," as they were often called — could appeal to a religious culture that was widely shared. Before the 1840s, most schools were operated by churches, hence targeted at families already connected with particular denominations. The common schools movement tried to bring everyone together on a non-denominational foundation, with Bible reading substituted for theological discussion. It says much about America that this movement so largely succeeded. Immigrant Catholics in eastern cities could be recruited into separate (private) "parochial schools," but most Americans set aside denominational differences in support of common public schools.

In other words, divided into dozens of different congregational or denominational arrangements, religious Americans could think of themselves as obdurate individualists, jealously guarding their own freedom of conscience — or as part of a vast, underlying consensus on basic principles. Most of them were both and were drawn in different directions for that reason. Common schools did not prevent continued sectarian splintering in other respects.

The same dilemma confronts religious conservatives today. What prevents them from seeing that their dilemma is an old one is the seductive notion that everything has changed in this century because of a new "culture war" of which they are the main victims.

Culture wars past

How did this idea come to have the power it exerts today over religious conservatives? The answer is that contemporary liberals have told and retold the story of their rise to preeminence in America — and told it so confidently that it has come to be believed even by conservatives.

A version of this liberal legend (as academics might say, this "cultural script") appears, for example, in Cal Thomas's and Ed Dobson's book. The story goes somewhat like this: The country used to be religious. Then modernization and secularization took hold with the growth of commerce, technology, and cities. Religious conservatives made a desperate effort to fight back the tide with Prohibition and the Scopes trial, and the humiliating failure of these efforts forced conservative Christians to retreat from politics for decades thereafter. And only the excesses of the 1960s and '70s prompted their re-emergence.

As it turns out, however, none of this is quite right, and as a single story it is altogether misleading.

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The temperance crusade, for starters, was a continuing element of American politics for most of the nineteenth century. Its leading champions before and after the Civil War were not wrathful Christians but Republican reformers, who mixed temperance crusades with pleas for the abolition of slavery and in later times with campaigns for women's suffrage and the abolition of child labor. Campaigns against alcohol abuse were the equivalent of contemporary campaigns against drug use and no more the special concern of "conservatives" than the drug war is today. If anything, the effort to bring government into the moral campaign against alcohol was the special concern of "Progressives" — as it is today in the war against tobacco.

Advocates of a Prohibition amendment were, in fact, particularly prominent at the Progressive Party convention that nominated Theodore Roosevelt as its candidate in 1912. The Progressives did clamor for trust-busting, for federal regulation of industry, for conservation programs and other reforms. But nobody regarded a federal prohibition on alcohol use as at all out of place in this wider agenda. Leaders of the Women's Christian Temperance Union played a prominent role there on many issues — it was the first political party convention to support women's suffrage by admitting women delegates. The Progressive Party described itself as "the recrudescence of the religious spirit in American political life" and was so seen by others: The *New York Times* described the 1912 convention as "a Methodist camp following done over into political terms." The Progressives did, in fact, sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" at their convention.

Campaigns against alcohol abuse were the equivalent of contemporary campaigns against drug use.

From first to last, moreover, the main opposition to temperance crusades and the Prohibition amendment came not from "secularists" or "liberals" but rather from traditional Catholics and Lutherans, whose religious convictions did not make them sympathetic to teetotaling (nor to women's suffrage nor many other progressive reforms). Far from giving pause to advocates of Prohibition, such opposition only made them all the more eager to correct the erring ways of immigrants and their children.

Now consider the actual record of the Scopes trial itself — a singularly defining struggle, or so we have been taught to believe, between traditional religion and modern science. That prosecution of a Tennessee school teacher for teaching the theory of evolution is now regarded as a turning point of history, an American version of the Roman Church's persecution of Galileo. Even many religious conservatives now wince at the mention of the Scopes trial. It is supposed to bring to mind all that is backward and intolerant in traditional religion. And the scorn it aroused is supposed to explain why fundamentalists felt forced to withdraw from politics until the day before

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yesterday. But almost none of these notions derive from the historical record — indeed, they are refuted by it.

Begin with the first element of that myth — the positing of a fundamentalist monolith. The term "fundamentalism" itself derives from a series of essays, published between 1905 and 1915, distributed under the general title, *The Fundamentals of Christianity*. It was a characteristic American effort to sum up theological points of agreement among otherwise rival (Protestant) denominations. It was certainly motivated by reaction against "modernist" or "liberal" interpretations of the Bible then gaining ground in theological seminaries. But the World Christian Fundamentals Association, established in 1919 to organize support for these doctrines, was still one of many competing organizations, and none could really claim a disciplined mass following. Even *The Fundamentals* had published articles expressing openness to certain theories of human evolution. At the very moment when the Scopes trial was opening, fundamentalists tried to get the Southern Baptist Convention (then meeting in nearby Chattanooga, Tenn.) to declare opposition to the theory of evolution as an essential Baptist tenet. The resolution was overwhelmingly defeated.

The prosecution was not a crusade but a project of civic boosters who wanted to put Dayton, Tenn. on the map.

Far from being the culmination of a massive campaign against modern science, the Scopes trial was something of a freak — one of those oddities of a decade when mass communications stimulated a whole series of remarkable stunts. The *Chattanooga Times* indeed referred to the trial as a "stunt." To be sure, the Tennessee legislature did enact a measure excluding the teaching of evolution from public schools. But it was signed into law by a reform-minded governor who had won a national reputation as a "progressive" for his efforts to expand and improve public education in the state. The measure was seen as a compromise with the fundamentalists, buying their continued support for public education by leaving controversial subjects outside the schools, as fundamentalists themselves were prepared to do on points of theological dispute.

As for other details of the trial, almost every one is the opposite of what the post-Scopes mythology would have us suppose. The newly formed American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was so eager to offer a test case that it took out a newspaper ad offering to pay the expenses *for the prosecution*. Scopes was the only teacher ever prosecuted and the prosecution was not a crusade but a project of civic boosters who wanted to put Dayton, Tenn. on the map. Local "promoters" induced a local prosecutor to initiate charges, after they had recruited John Scopes to stand as defendant. They envisioned the trial as something akin to a Chautauqua lecture series and, even before

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William Jennings Bryan agreed to appear for the prosecution, they had tried (unsuccessfully) to enlist H.G. Wells to appear as a star witness for the defense. John Scopes was not even a biology teacher but a 24-year-old math teacher and football coach who subsequently admitted (in private) that he could not really recall whether he had actually mentioned evolution when he did substitute teaching in biology. The trial "promoters" were delighted (though the ACLU was not) when Clarence Darrow, celebrated "agnostic," agreed to take up the defense of Scopes.

William Jennings Bryan, who was eager to appear in a duel with Darrow, announced in advance that he would pay Scopes's fine if the prosecution succeeded. And he proceeded to couch the prosecution case, not in religious terms, but in broadly populist terms: "The right of the people speaking through the legislature to control the schools which they create and support is the real issue as I see it."

Most commentators treated the Scopes trial as at best a draw — and no great credit to either side.

Far from seeing his case as a fundamentalist crusade, Bryan asked the vice president of the American Jewish Congress, a highly successful New York lawyer, to assist him in his legal pleadings. Samuel Untermyer (with whom Bryan had long been associated in Democratic Party politics) immediately cabled encouragement and advice. Even H.L. Mencken, reporting from the scene of the trial, acknowledged that there was not "any evidence in the town of that poisonous spirit which usually shows itself where Christian men gather to defend the great doctrines of their faith."

Nor did the final outcome have anywhere near the drama of a great historic event. After Scopes's conviction, the Tennessee Supreme Court, characterizing the trial as "bizarre," cut off an anticipated appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court by remitting Scopes's fine on a strained technicality — but only after holding that the law, itself, was a constitutional exercise of legislative control over schools and no threat to free speech, because it was only dealing with school curricula. The state attorney general then followed the court's suggestion to drop the case.

These and other remarkable details are documented in a careful study of what actually happened at the Scopes trial, *Summer of the Gods*, published in 1997 by historian Edward J. Larson. What Larson also documents is that few observers at the time saw the trial as a great turning point. Most commentators treated it as at best a draw — and no great credit to either side. The trial came to achieve mythic proportions only decades later, when (as a journalist who covered the original trial put it) the Scopes trial became "part of the folklore of liberalism."

By the 1950s, historians looked back on the trial as an illustration of heartland intolerance. "In the shadow of McCarthyism," as Larson reports,

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historians "inevitably" invoked the Scopes trial "alongside the Red Scare [following World War I], even though fundamentalists did not initiate or disproportionately participate in that earlier assault against alleged domestic Communists. Ballyhoo gave way to bogeymen." In 1955, *Inherit the Wind*, the Broadway stage play, later made into a successful movie, helped make the Scopes trial a favorite metaphor for religious intolerance. (The projection of their own prejudices upon the national past was a familiar compulsion among liberal moralists of the day. In his account of the Salem witch trials of the seventeenth century, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* launched its breathless defense of tolerance and reason with comparable disregard for the historical facts).

Also contrary to myth, the fact is that "fundamentalists" did not fall back in confusion following the Scopes trial. They were already divided and discouraged, relegated, for the most part, to specialized journals and newspapers of their own in the 1920s. Even in the 1920s, their adherents were more likely to be people of less education and affluence, who were not, in any case, very active in politics. Everywhere in the South and even in much of the Midwest, "fundamentalist" Protestants voted for Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s — and made no fuss about his support for the repeal of Prohibition. As late as 1976, half of those voters who identified themselves as "evangelical Christians" voted for Jimmy Carter, who was quite ready to present himself as "born again" and saw no conflict between his religious views and his liberal policy commitments.

The "culture war" that isn't

If religion in politics is nothing new, neither is opposition to religion in politics. And both tendencies have frequently been tangled together. As in the 1760s, Congregational ministers were loudest in denouncing taxation for an Anglican bishop in North America — as a threat to "religious liberty"; so, in the 1780s, it was Baptists in Virginia who were the strongest supporters of Jefferson's campaign against state aid to churches — for fear it would disadvantage their own lay preachers. In the 1840s, Congress heeded the call of New England clergymen to honor the Sabbath by ending Sunday mail deliveries; Jacksonian Democrats quickly reinstated Sunday mail delivery to demonstrate the government's impartiality among competing sabbatarian doctrines. So in the 1980s, many liberals denounced the Moral Majority for mixing religion and politics, though they had applauded the involvement of clergymen in the civil rights struggles in the 1960s and the anti-war movement in the 1970s. And not a few supporters of the Moral Majority had themselves denounced these earlier ventures — for mixing religion with politics.

Yet a lot of religious conservatives now talk as if they had been victimized by some peculiarly new and sinister line of attack. Not only are the slogans

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hurled against them quite old, they are not notably more effective in our time. Certainly the collapse of the Moral Majority as an organization did not reflect any wider triumph for its opponents. At just the time when the Moral Majority itself was floundering, after all, Ronald Reagan was triumphantly re-elected and four years later, George Bush came from behind to win the White House as his successor.

Even the Clinton years have hardly been a return to 1960s liberalism on social issues. The truth is rather the reverse: Clinton has prospered by co-opting conservative social issues from Republicans. From his initial campaign in 1992, he was eager to display his concern for families and for faith, having himself photographed in church with his own family, carrying the Bible, singing hymns with families in churches around the country. After his initial blunder in trying to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military, he promptly retreated on that issue and never looked back. When a Republican Congress sought to embarrass Clinton by enacting the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996 — authorizing federal agencies and state governments to refuse to acknowledge the validity of same-sex marriages — Clinton signed it without a word of protest.

Preoccupation with "culture war" blinds conservatives to the very real victories they have achieved.

Conservatives rightly protest that Clinton mocked his own marriage vows and then lied about it under oath. But the reason he lied, after all, was that his polling suggested to him that the public would not be at all quick to forgive his conduct. Maddening as Clinton's defense was in the ensuing impeachment fight, it was all conducted in the shadow of public disapprobation — which was why the president's staunchest defenders were quick to insist that his conduct was indeed "indefensible" (but just not impeachable), rather than trying to rally the country to a full-throated endorsement of adultery and perjury. Perhaps it was all unpardonably hypocritical. But was it an example of "culture war"?

Looking back, the rhetoric of "culture war" seems inappropriate to our situation for several reasons. First, if Hunter's original thesis is correct and "denominational differences" no longer loom very large — even among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (and an emerging Muslim minority) — then "orthodoxy" is not really about the Bible. It is "religious" in such an abstract sense that even the divinity of Jesus becomes a secondary question. This is descriptively true of a sizable body of "religious conservatives" — at least in their attitude toward public policy. But if they can compromise their differences with each other, they can compromise other differences and find common cause with those who share "traditional values" and are far less serious about biblical authority than they are.

Indeed, the preoccupation with "culture war" blinds conservatives to the

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very real victories they have recently achieved — and to the reasons for their having achieved them. *Roe* v. *Wade* has not been overturned, but the Supreme Court has finally begun to allow some restrictions on abortion that register moral concerns. More strikingly, the court has refused to extend *Roe* v. *Wade* into a right to assisted suicide, while voters have repeatedly rejected state referenda on this issue and Dr. Kevorkian's crusade has finally landed him in jail. On school choice, religious conservatives have built coalitions in a number of states to gain indirect public funding for religious schools, over tremendous opposition from teachers' unions. This is an extremely promising development for the future. But, like the successful resistance to the euthanasia movement, it could not have been achieved by religious conservatives on their own. It could only have been done by building coalitions with people who share similar aims and attitudes on particular issues, for their own, sometimes divergent, reasons.

Second, the metaphor of war itself imputes an absurdly inflated sense of discipline and purpose on each side. Hunter divides the world into "orthodox" and "progressive" forces, but the latter are largely defined in the most abstract terms as opposing the "biblical" or "traditional" precepts of the former. This takes at face value the notion that "reason" or "Enlightenment" points clearly in one direction — a conceit that is not even maintained these days by the most "progressive" thinkers in universities. Is it "progressive" to side with feminist hectoring — or with hedonist self-indulgence? Is it "progressive" to take sides with regulatory enthusiasts ("safety fascists") — or with reckless thrill-seekers? Is it "progressive" to stand with "science" — or with post-modernist assaults on the authority of "western science" (or "patriarchal science," as advanced feminists now call it)? It is all these things and a dozen others, equally confused and contradictory. Who is really more confused and defensive in our time, believers in "progress" or believers in God?

Then, too, who is the commander in chief of the "orthodox" forces in this war (and who is his "progressive" counterpart)? Many have claimed the mantle. But how good are their claims? Is there anyone of whom it can be said: When he commands, conservative Christians obey?

The third difficulty with the "culture war" diagnosis derives from the other two. Both sides in this "war" have ended up appealing to common rhetorical themes in their effort to enlist the great bewildered and exasperated American middle. The left talks endlessly about "oppression" — and now so does the right, even the religious right, which has become quite adept at lawsuits invoking the "rights" of religious students or parents or citizens. The left hearkens to the glory of the civil rights movement — and now so does the right, when it appeals to the "right to life" or the "right to choose" in education. Both sides have their lawyers, as well as their lobbyists, their pollsters, and their issue advisors. Both sides try, with varying degrees of success, to show that they are just regular folks who think what most other Americans would think if only they were paying as much atten-

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tion. A lot of it may be disingenuous, but you can't wear a public mask for too long without growing into it.

The truth about America seems to be far messier than a "culture war" between "orthodox" and "progressive" forces. We are in the midst of many overlapping and cross-cutting social conflicts. Yes, there are deep divisions regarding public recognition or accommodation of religion and on sexual morals and "family values." But the same is true for attitudes about gun ownership. And also for views on multiculturalism. There are also deep divisions in attitudes about risk and security in economic affairs, about the aims of developers and the concerns of environmentalists, about animal rights and human needs, about the claims of children and the potentialities of pharmacology — and on and on and on. Quite a lot of these disputes elicit a moralistic rhetoric on one side and an answer of skeptical hooting on the other. But they don't at all line up neatly as cultural divisions between religious conservatives and secularizing "progressives." We are a nation of Puritans and a nation of scoffers and we do quite a lot of arguing. And we have long been so. (Mark Twain's scoffing — and his immense popularity — a century ago should remind us of both: "To be good is noble but to show others how to be good is nobler and no trouble.") That doesn't quite add up to a "war."

Some observers view this as fragmentation. But it is perhaps more notable how hard it is for the fragments to escape the tides of popular culture that wash over the whole country. So, for example, the Southern Baptist Convention caused a stir last year when it urged its membership to boycott Disney World and Disney movies until the studio changed its policy on something or other. Not enough attention was paid to the premise — that Southern Baptists would otherwise be cheerfully buying tickets from the folks at Disney. And no doubt they would be. Similarly, when Pat Robertson seized the opportunity presented by cable television to organize his own cable network — the Christian Broadcasting Network — it turned out to fill most of its airtime with recycled Hollywood TV shows and not even from the glorious 1950s but from the troubled 1970s. Perhaps it is a bit cleaner than current fare. But it is not a separate world view. What does it mean that the same channel has metamorphosed in the past year into the Fox Family Channel without much noticeable change in programming?

The "almost chosen" country

When Paul Weyrich and Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson urge Christians to cultivate their own gardens, there is a sense in which their prescription is unexceptionable, even self-evident. Culture of any kind requires cultivation. Serious religious faith requires devotion. No one grasps God's word on the fly or glimpses God's promise in passing. Souls nourished on little more than the offerings of the entertain-

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ment industry will be spiritually starved. Expecting popular culture to do the work of churches or Bible studies is on a par with expecting to find spiritual inspiration from the Gallup poll. Popular culture may be more debased than it used to be, but it was always beneath the standards pious people set for themselves.

Still, it remains dangerous and self-defeating for religious conservatives to see popular culture as simply an arena for politics and then to see politics in terms of a single, overriding culture war. Wars force people to take sides. In a real war, those who are not with us must be against us. That sort of polarizing politics is quite dangerous if you do not have the majority on your side — and religious conservatives have no reason to think they have a reliable, natural majority on their side. But the majority will only be against them if forced to take sides. There is certainly no majority for what Weyrich denounces as "cultural Marxism" and no evidence at all, that I can see, for his warning that the U.S. is becoming "totally dominated by an alien ideology" that is "bitterly hostile to Western culture." Few Americans now seem to be "bitterly" anything. Liberal politicians certainly don't seem to feel they have much electoral support for anything except a bit more gun control — and even there, victory keeps eluding them.

Wars force people to take sides. In a real war, those who are not with us must be against us.

The German term *Kulturkampf* derives from Bismarck's struggle to bring Catholic institutions under Prussian state control in the 1870s. It is a phrase that does reflect actual historical experience — but not very much in this country. *Kulturkampf* ideology had its echoes in struggles in many other European countries trying like Bismarck to erect modern states over the opposition (or imputed opposition) of faithful Catholics. Related dreams of "progress" later unloosed far more fanatical — and murderous — programs in the twentieth century, with far more fanatical and murderous reactions. Since World War II, voters in most of Western Europe have recoiled from apocalyptic politics and have settled instead for a satisfied cynicism. No longer seeking inspiration in politics, they expect politicians to be corrupt and politics to be a game of party maneuver.

As real culture war is remote from American experience, so are its alternate legacies of fanaticism and fatalism. Conservatives here are dismayed that most citizens seemed willing, in the end, to put up with a president who proved to be a perjurer and an adulterer. But in France, only a few years ago, people put up with a president who proved to be a Nazi collaborator. Americans are still far from that degree of sophistication.

This point is so obvious that even social scientists notice it on occasion. The political scientist Ronald Inglehart organized a vast survey of "values"

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in 42 countries in the early 1990s. One of Inglehart's most interesting findings, described in his book *Modernism and Postmodernism*, is that national pride tends to be strongly correlated with religious faith. In Latin America, Africa, and other parts of the developing world, overwhelming majorities of respondents tell the pollsters that they are "very proud" of their nationality and that God is "very important" in their lives. In Western Europe, only minorities give these answers to either question. The United States is near the top of the charts on both.

Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson protest that it is wrong for Christian conservatives to think of America as a special country. But they do, and they long have. That's what most Americans have always believed about their country.

Is this a sign of proper piety or of sinful pride? Perhaps some of both. The Psalm says that "God has made the nations." We talk here about popular consent. Lincoln, who epitomized our system as government "by the people" as well as "for the people," also referred to Americans as an "almost chosen people." A good phrase, implying that American citizenship is not just a matter of right but, as old-fashioned Protestants used to say, a calling. I can't say it is un-Christian for religious conservatives to withdraw from politics. But I am sure it is un-American.

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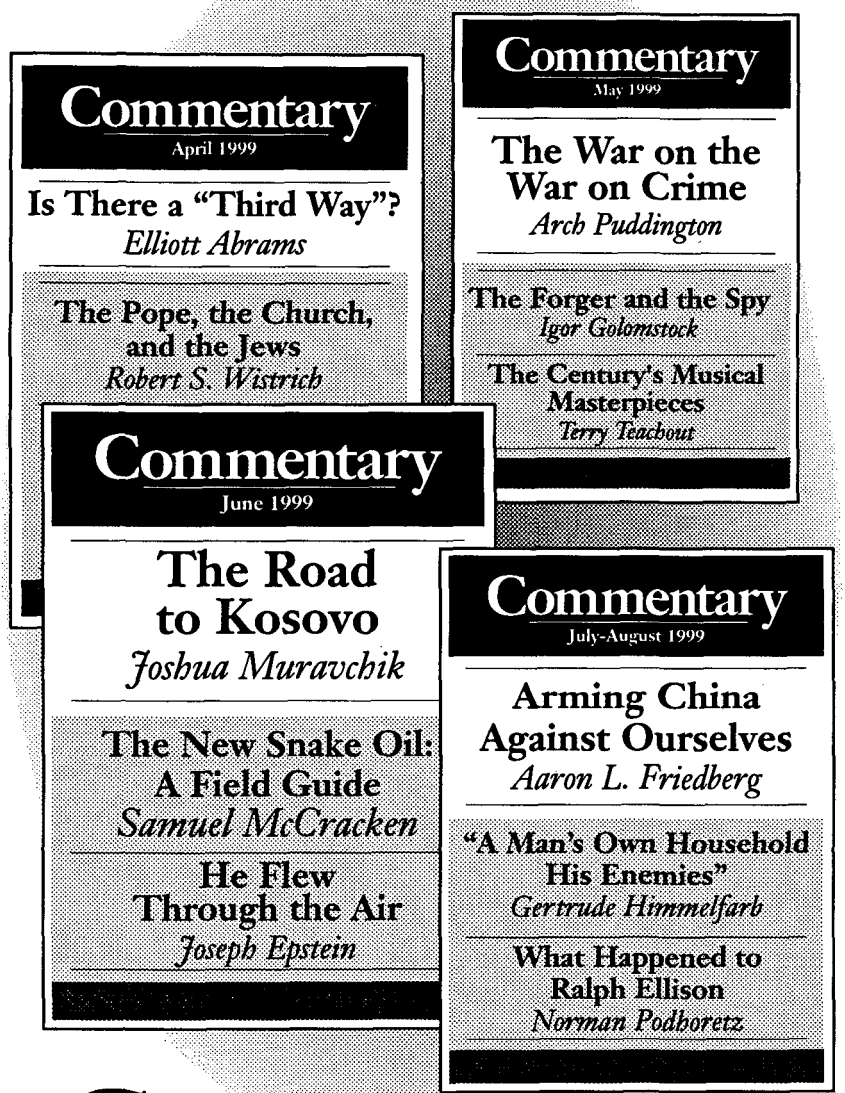
"Nothing like it."

—A.M. Rosenthal



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The Quadrennial Fear Of Ideas

Policy and Presidential Campaigns

By DANIEL CASSE

IN THE WANING DAYS of the Dole-Kemp '96 presidential campaign, Sen. Dole motioned to me to join him in the cluster of four seats at the front left side of the airplane, his onboard command center. Two pairs of seats faced each other. Dole always occupied the first seat on the aisle, from which he could look back into the rest of the plane, eyeing his staff and behind them, the traveling press corps. The other three seats were reserved for his wife when she traveled with us, a distinguished campaign guest (President Ford, singer Lee Greenwood, golfer Chi Chi Rodriguez, and others all occupied these seats briefly), or a member of the senior staff with whom Dole wanted to confer.

On this day, as on most, Dole sat alone. Then he nodded in my direction, a signal that something was on his mind.

"What do you think," he asked, "if we were to announce that if we don't get our tax cuts from Congress within the first two years, I'll resign?"

I instantly recognized the idea as the type of ill-conceived, eleventh-hour gimmick that presidential campaigns find irresistible. It depressed me. But as the designated "policy advisor" on board, I knew it was my job to knock the idea down.

Daniel Casse served as special assistant to President Bush, policy director on Lamar Alexander's 1996 presidential campaign, and senior director of policy and speechwriting on the Dole-Kemp '96 campaign. He is a senior director of the White House Writers Group.

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I patiently explained to the senator why he should not allow a stubborn Congress to jettison his presidency. His 15 percent across-the-board tax cut was a serious, carefully constructed plan worth fighting for, even if it took four years or more. Moreover, I argued, there was no reason for him to signal in advance that his plan might be rejected. He should exude a sense of confidence and commitment while leading the charge for comprehensive tax reform.

Dole listened, then sought the views of aides across the aisle. Soon enough, he turned back to me, apparently persuaded by the cool reason of my argument.

"Okay," he said, "forget that idea. Instead we'll just say that if we don't get the tax cuts in two years, Kemp will resign."

This tiny glimpse of the life inside the most recent Republican presidential campaign might partially explain why a generation of Republican staff and advisors could not help but find the perpetually irascible Dole to be an endearing figure. But the story is also a fair illustration of the strange, highly unstructured, seat-of-the-pants quality of policy making on a presidential campaign. On Dole's campaign plane, and on the airplanes of so many other candidates, major decisions are made on a whim.

To those less familiar with the mechanics of a national political campaign, the notion that policy making is often a disorganized, even careless undertaking may seem surprising. "Policy" and "issues," after all, are traditionally thought to be the most serious and sensitive components of any national election campaign. Ostensibly, they are at the core of a candidate's appeal. Aides tasked with identifying and fleshing out policy proposals are viewed by pundits as the in-house experts, the technocrats, and the vital link to the community of think tanks, budget czars, and policy intellectuals in Washington. Journalists such as Joe Klein and E.J. Dionne quote them extensively, giving credence to the notion that campaigns have a deep attachment to serious new thinking on the issues.

Whether such new thinking ever makes its way through the campaign apparatus and into the mouth of a candidate matters little. Presidential campaigns elaborately go through the motions of recruiting and meeting with policy advisors. And the policy world is delighted to oblige. Every four years, economists, criminologists, and welfare analysts from academia cheerfully fly across the country to confer with presidential aspirants and discuss substantive matters. Working committees are assembled to produce policy papers on sugar subsidies, export policy, arms control, and other issues of no relevance to the outcome of an election. Teams of "gray beards" gather to review every press statement on economics and foreign policy. Unsolicited memos, sometimes running more than a dozen pages, are furtively handed to a candidate's aides during rallies or fundraisers by aspiring Washington experts.

All these efforts are not in vain. Campaigns work hard to attract and develop policy ideas because every voter wants to know — or at least claims

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to want to know — where a candidate stands "on the issues." But what the public, the press, and even the candidate mean by "the issues" has become less clear as ideology has seeped out of our national political culture. It is a truism that television ads, polling, fundraising, sound bites, and gabbing with the press now occupy a far more prominent and important role in national political contests.

But less well-understood is how, in the hands of campaign strategists, policy formulation has been reduced to a less controversial and ultimately less consequential activity. Campaigns rarely make or propose policy these days. It is considered too risky an undertaking. Ideas still have consequences, but that may be the reason presidential campaigns keep a safe distance from them. Campaign strategy, for the most part, has become an exercise less in developing policy than in diluting it.

Policy at the periphery

In his most recent book, *The New Prince*, erstwhile Clinton advisor Dick Morris argues that "issues" are nothing more than the proper distillation and interpretation of public sentiment. This is hardly news. Almost every prominent politician adheres to this view. Indeed, the fact that polling, not policy, drives a national campaign has been true for more than three decades. Looking back on recent campaigns, what is striking is how rarely a presidential candidate has used his election bid to set out a clear agenda. Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign is the glaring exception, one that seems to prove the rule.

The late John Ehrlichman was a top campaign manager during Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential run and became domestic policy advisor in the White House. In his post-Watergate days, he spoke often about the president's underappreciated domestic agenda on the environment, Indian affairs, and economics. But in his political memoir, Ehrlichman's discussion of campaign policy is limited to the details of advance work and crowd building. "Policy" appears to have been restricted to strategies for dealing with anti-Nixon hecklers at carefully orchestrated rallies. With the exception of his speeches on ending the war in Vietnam, it is hard to find a single policy idea consistently promoted during the 1968 Republican campaign.

Eight years later, in September 1976, Jimmy Carter discovered that he had won the Democratic nomination and coasted through a national convention without ever advancing a substantive set of ideas for governance. In a meeting with his closest advisors in Plains, Ga. he realized that their campaign was based solely on the phrases "leadership," "competence," and "the economy." He was fortunate, however. He faced a Ford campaign that was even more content-free.

That was no accident. In June of that year, trailing Carter by 15 points, the president's advisors proposed a "no campaign strategy" keeping the

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president within the confines of the Rose Garden until the fall debates.

Even a candidate as closely associated with (conservative) policy issues as Reagan chose not to base his 1984 re-election bid on the appeal of policy proposals. Despite the fact that he had spent much of his public career talking about tax cuts, there was nothing in Ronald Reagan's speeches or statements during 1984 even hinting that the country would, two years later, adopt the most far-reaching tax reform plan of the postwar era.

That policy was irrelevant to his re-election campaign was something tacitly acknowledged by his advisors — even those reputed to be policy experts. When in the fall of 1984 the campaign managers from both sides gathered at the Kennedy School's quadrennial bacchanalia of campaign retrospectives, Richard Darman was asked what specific policies played a role in the president's re-election campaign. The best list he could come up with included the administration's decision not to challenge the War Powers Resolution during the incursion in Lebanon; the so-called TEFRA tax increase in 1982 (sound policy, by his lights); and initiatives to promote Hispanics and women in the workplace. It is safe to say that today no one else remembers these policy ideas of the '84 campaign.

At this remove, the '92 campaign looks much less like an exercise in national policy discussion.

By contrast, Bill Clinton's exhaustively documented 1992 campaign appeared, at the time, to be a revival of the idea-driven campaign. Clinton was a self-styled "policy wonk." He loved discussing ideas. He stayed up all hours at the Renaissance Weekend, or at meetings of the Southern Governors Association or Democratic Leadership Council, chewing over ideas about universal health care and job creation programs. His popular town meetings and economic summits were touted as informal settings for the exchange of ideas.

At this remove, however, the '92 campaign looks much less like an exercise in national policy discussion than his advocates at the time wanted us to believe. *Putting People First*, the campaign document touted as the core of Clinton's policy agenda, has grown flimsy with age. Of course, no campaign document should be expected to be a work of original economic and policy research, nor a document for the ages. But in *Putting People First* we see the unmistakable signs of Clinton's ability to use the patina of policy to appear substantive. Rather than merely ignoring policy, as so many earlier campaigns had done, Clinton in 1992 had figured out how policy was *useful* — an easily manipulated instrument of campaign politics. Policy, government's most solemn enterprise, had become a means to the end of electoral victory, not an end in itself.

We now know from Bob Woodward's book, *The Agenda*, that most of the policy prescriptions in *Putting People First* were mere gestures intended

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to suggest a commitment to health care, new spending, and a middle class tax cut without advancing any specific proposals. That was enough for the campaign to cultivate a following among policy experts and ideas types, who were free to fill in the blanks with whatever suited their fancy. These indispensable allies, in turn, showed up on C-SPAN and were quoted in the *Washington Post* attesting to the fact that Clinton's campaign was deeply committed to ideas, lending the candidate credibility and an air of seriousness even in the absence of specifics. But as Woodward and others have revealed, the major policy debate during the creation of *Putting People First* was how to back up Ira Magaziner's preposterous claim that universal health care could be provided without increasing the budget deficit. (Interestingly, for all the fanfare *Putting People First* received in 1992, it barely merits a mention in George Stephanopoulos's recent memoir.)

The Clinton team understood that posturing had become policy.

The true superficiality of Democratic policy making during the '92 campaign comes in a telling anecdote related by Woodward. In the final weekend before releasing *Putting People First*, Clinton friend and advisor Robert Reich had been hospitalized for hip surgery. But he still insisted on seeing the final draft of the policy book.

No mere "Friend of Bill," Reich had established himself as one of Clinton's most influential ideas men. He also had the professional pedigree — a Harvard professor who had written widely on economics and labor policy. When he examined the draft of *Putting People First* he immediately placed an anguished call to Clinton aide Gene Sperling, the document's chief editor. This was Reich's opportunity to shape the central policy document of the campaign and perhaps commit a future Clinton administration to a specific legislative agenda. With this enviable opportunity Reich insisted on the addition of just two ideas. The first was the establishment of an "Economic Security Council." Sperling added it to the draft and, once in office, Clinton established this meaningless layer of bureaucratic turf inside the already crowded confines of federal economic policy. (And in the tradition of policy advisors creating otherwise unnecessary positions for themselves, the council is now headed by Sperling himself.) The second and still more fatuous idea Reich wanted in the book was his pet theory about the centrality of human capital. Sperling quickly satisfied the request with this hoary piece of boilerplate: "The only resource that's really rooted in a nation — and the ultimate source of all its wealth — is its people." The Clinton team understood that, by the early 1990s, posturing had become policy.

By late 1995, Clinton no longer had the luxury of posing as policy entrepreneur. His most ambitious idea, health care reform, had become a case study in policy-making debacles and a principal contributor to the Democrats' loss of both chambers of Congress in 1994. Moreover, in the

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"Contract with America" and in tireless appearances as the chief explainer of the new "Republican Revolution," Newt Gingrich was the new star on the ideas front. Clinton's good news came in the form of Dick Morris, who assured his candidate that policy was no longer necessary. Thus, the 1996 campaign against Dole was deliberately designed to avoid any of the ambitious plans that had shaped his 1992 campaign. The role of policy wonk was quickly abandoned. Instead of a candidate of ideas, Clinton had become a representative of an abstract concept: the sensible center between the irresponsible extremes of hard-hearted Republicanism and soft-headed liberalism. This much-discussed pursuit of "triangulation" successfully foiled the Republican strategy of painting the president as an unrepentant liberal committed to the reintroduction of health care mega-legislation among other big-government prescriptions. It also had the practical effect of marginalizing the role of substantive policy throughout the election campaign.

The fear of ideas

MORRIS IS NO FOOL. He understood something that many policy experts do not: The public rarely responds to ambitious policy measures. Despite the perennial demand from the press for "specifics," the public finds specifics boring. Moreover, in public opinion surveys, voters never mention (perhaps they are never asked about) across-the-board tax cuts, private Social Security accounts, or family tax credits as subjects they care about most. Instead, they invariably list "the economy," "drugs and crime," or "education" as the most important issues facing the nation. But rather than treat these vague responses as a general guide to popular sentiment, the pollster-strategists interpret this data as a strategic mandate from the voters. They thus conclude that their candidate must run as "the education president" or mention the nation's "moral crisis" prominently in every speech.

The pollster-strategists believe not only that this is a wise course for attracting voters, but also that it is safest. Almost every focus group and poll tells campaign staff that ordinary voters recoil whenever they confront controversial ideas. Ideas about taxes or health care or education that voters have never heard of are controversial. Here, for example, is advice given to Sen. Dole by journeyman Republican political advisor Don Devine in April 1995, almost a year and half before the presidential election and long before the budget showdown and government shutdown: "If there is one [issue] that can blow our coalition off course it is Medicare. I've seen the focus groups and polls done by the RNC."

Medicare, in other words, was yet another third rail. Touch it, and you die. What Devine fails to mention, however, is that by that time, the Democratic National Committee, under the direction of Dick Morris, had already begun preparing television ads warning the public about "Dole-

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Gingrich" spending cuts that would gut Medicare (among other things). They began to air in July 1995, more than a year before the nominating conventions. As he describes in his memoir *Behind the Oval Office*, Morris was flabbergasted that the GOP never responded:

> Once we were advertising heavily, no rational strategist should have failed to oppose our ads, especially ones so aggressively pointed at Dole's and Gingrich's issue positions. I kept telling myself, "They *have to* answer." But they never did. . . . I was stumped.

What mystified Morris shouldn't have been so puzzling. The fact is that the Republican campaign advisors were (as Devine tells us) reading the same polling results indicating public concerns about Medicare. Spooked by the possibility that any new idea to reform the program — even one that could easily be shown to improve it — would be perceived as too controversial, the Dole campaign kept mum, with the disastrous consequences that followed.

New ideas are contentious, tedious, or simply unfamiliar.

New ideas are contentious, tedious, or simply unfamiliar. That is the principal reason campaign strategists don't like them. It is impossible to appreciate the inner dynamics of a presidential campaign without understanding this tension between promoting a bold vision and scaring off potential voters who, despite all the blather about "change," often defiantly cling to the status quo. Because of this tension, campaign managers and candidates turn to polling results.

There is a tendency among policy intellectuals to dismiss out of hand the role of polling in presidential campaigns. That is too hasty a judgement. Any serious campaign must rely on polling to determine in which states a candidate has a chance to succeed, whether paid advertising can have an impact, and what the most revealing perceived strengths and weaknesses of a candidate are. Polling tells a campaign where it should spend money and focus its efforts. And it helps reassure campaign managers that the millions of dollars about to be spent on advertising could actually have an impact. For decades, every serious presidential campaign has been based on a theory of winning that is ultimately constructed by detailed examination of polling data.

But once a campaign is under way, the deeper controversy over polling begins. The polling adherents (who usually extend well beyond the campaign's professional pollsters) typically want to design a campaign around a series of themes that have demonstrated resonance in focus groups. They advocate the repeated use of specific words and phrases that have generated strong positive responses from "dial groups" — the focus groups in which individuals instantly register their reaction to a speech or advertisement with a hand-held device. It is a very circular exercise. Themes are what pollsters

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explore in focus groups and, therefore, themes are what shape a campaign. Their advice to candidates is to present easily digestible themes that change each day, week, or month. To these advisors, the "issues" are non-divisive topics such as "jobs," "child care," "the economy," or "our children."

The policy crowd, on the other hand, wants the candidate to take his case to the public through a hard-hitting, specific agenda: a short list of what the candidate will do in office. Policy advocates want health care reform, tax cuts, job creation, the minimum wage, or environmental protection to set the terms of the campaign. They talk about speeches rather than phrases. They believe the *New York Times* is more influential than "Good Morning America" (because the former focuses on issues while the latter promotes general sentiments). And while policy advocates, too, construct thematic scenarios for the campaign, they almost always return to advocacy of a series of bold initiatives.

The split between policy advocates and theme promoters divides every presidential campaign.

The split between policy advocates and theme promoters divides every presidential campaign. This is why the hardest fought battles among campaign staff rarely involve matters of policy, nor do the divisions that emerge within a campaign along the usual liberal, moderate, or conservative lines have much significance. The central struggle for control in a campaign is more frequently over how large a role policy should play in a candidate's pursuit of the presidency in the first place.

A good example can be seen in President Bush's re-election campaign. In June 1992, campaign strategist Mike Murphy sent a powerful memo to the Bush/Quayle re-election team, whose response illustrates just how uncomfortable a campaign can be with the world of policy. Murphy warned that the only way to energize the listless campaign was to announce something like a "First 100 Days of the Second Term" strategy. He urged the campaign to consider an unambiguous list of initiatives — school choice, term limits, tax relief, balanced budget, spending cuts — that would make clear the difference between Republican and Democratic leadership that the Clinton campaign was trying to erase. In the parlance of campaigning, these would be "defining ideas."

Murphy believed that policy ideas make campaigns. He argued, essentially, that the fruitless search for a "vision" theme would yield inconsequential results if the candidate could not tell the voters what he was going to do with the most powerful office in the world.

Murphy's unsolicited advice, not surprisingly, was never seriously considered. The chief strategist of Bush's re-election campaign that year was Robert Teeter, an accomplished senior pollster. He had long before concluded that a candidate's personal qualities were far more important than any

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policy proposals. He convinced the president and other senior aides that what was needed was a series of powerful themes — leadership, foreign policy, trust, etc. In John Podhoretz's wonderful book about the Bush White House, *Hell of a Ride*, he describes how Teeter passed out an organization chart for the Bush election strategy. In the center was a box titled "message." The box was empty.

How themes trump ideas

TEETER'S HAPLESS MANAGEMENT of the Bush campaign notwithstanding, the pursuit of evocative themes, not policy, is the prevailing theory inside both Republican and Democratic presidential campaigns. We know this because, for more than 20 years now, campaign strategists have been dutifully leaking campaign memos to reporters who then faithfully reprint them in campaign wrap-up books published once the election is over.

Read today, they are a depressing body of literature. Most of the publicly available memos by presidential campaign strategists are full of the pseudoscience of polling accompanied by overly stern statements about the need to send a message. When specific policy ideas appear, they seem incidental to the purpose of the campaign strategy. All of them seem to embrace pollster Pat Cadell's view that "presidential politics is always about images." His memos to Carter during the 1980 campaign are classics of the genre. In June 1980, when all signs indicated that Carter was in deep trouble, Cadell wrote: "people must be given a positive reason to vote for Jimmy Carter." Yet nowhere in a several thousand word memo does he even suggest what that positive reason might be.

Advice in the form of a strong call to action, without ever specifying the action, has also been in plentiful supply in Republican campaigns. In November 1991, when it first became apparent that the good feelings of the Persian Gulf War had evaporated for President Bush, Fred Malek, the man who would become deputy chairman of the president's re-election effort, sent a note arguing that what the campaign needed was "a clear set of Presidential initiatives [that] will help convey the image that you are in command domestically as well as in foreign affairs." Initiatives were needed, but what those initiatives should be seemed a secondary concern.

This kind of abstract campaign strategy, removed from the world of ideas and substance, is not restricted to losing campaigns. Stuart Spencer, the manager of Reagan's landslide victory in 1984, wrote to the White House: "We must let Ronald Reagan be Ronald Reagan by reinforcing the President's personality, characteristics, attributes, and values rather than defending a substantive record of aging victories." In a later memo he announced the purpose of the campaign: "to establish the President's vision of the future and the direction he will take and priorities for a second term."

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Luckily, that fuzzy advice wasn't substantially different from what Reagan's 1984 opponent, Walter Mondale, was receiving. His most thoughtful and influential speechwriter, Bernard Aronson, was quick to recognize that Mondale's dyed-in-the-wool liberalism was a campaign albatross. "The Mondale agenda for the 1980s," he wrote in one of a series of long strategy memos, is merely "the agendas of the NEA, AFL-CIO, UJA, NAACP, Sierra Club, LULAC, NOW, and the Gertrude Stein Club stapled together." Aronson seemed to understand that interest group politics was an insufficient message for a weak Democratic Party. But in the end, he, too, seemed incapable of recommending a better course of action for his candidate or even a specific policy idea. All he could suggest is that Mondale appear tough: "You must convince Americans that you will draw lines and stand your ground, take stands and fight for them, and kick ass, if necessary to get the job done." What, exactly, the job was that needed to get done, Aronson never mentioned.

Advisors who have few ideas about policy nevertheless want their candidates to appear tough, uncompromising, and committed to that "vision thing." The desire to have a powerful, thematic message far overshadows interest in having an agenda. This holds true even for superbly managed campaigns. The Clinton campaign of 1992 was message-obsessed. "It's the economy, stupid" instantly became an irritating Washington cliché. But note: Nothing in that clever little slogan suggested what a President Clinton would do about the economy. No matter. It was sufficient merely to appear deadly serious about it.

It would be an exaggeration to say that campaigns are devoid of policy ideas. In fact, polling has guaranteed that certain indisputably popular policies become a standard part of a candidate's message. Throughout the 1990s, a majority of voters said they supported a balanced budget. The death penalty for "drug kingpins" is an idea that pollsters refer to as an "80/20" — 80 percent of voters approve of it. But in general, the public reaction to previously unheard-of policy plans is chilly. In any case, polls are better at gauging support for general ideas, not specifics. (*"Would you say that the environment is 'very important,' 'important,' 'somewhat important,' or 'not important at all'?"*) So candidates, who understandably want to run on something that has data backing up its appeal, run on general ideas.

This, then, is the dilemma that confronts the policy advisors in every presidential campaign. A national campaign, one might assume, is the best forum for introducing a new framework for policy ideas. At no other time are so many people paying attention. The months-long campaign would "road test" ideas that could become the basis for a new governing agenda after the election. But everywhere during the campaign, the policy advisors are presented with "statistical evidence" that the new ideas that could make a campaign interesting and worthwhile apparently make voters uncomfortable.

In this context, the term "issues" has come to mean a cluster of related

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unobjectionable sentiments. Dick Morris made it virtually a fetish to reduce every idea to a tiny policy initiative whose chief value was its ability to crystallize a Third Way theme. Under the influence of such advisors, policy initiatives became merely the handmaiden of some evocative but ultimately meaningless theme.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the memo Democratic pollsters Mark Penn and Doug Schoen shared with the president in October 1995. In it, they describe at length the results of their "Neuro-Personality Poll," which claimed to show what types of people are attracted to the Clinton personality. Their assessment of this data makes a mockery of the notion that campaigns should be influenced by serious ideas. Instead of identifying ideas and seeing how the public might respond, the two pollsters manufactured a series of bland sentiments to see which ones voters would warm to. Thus was Bill Clinton's "values agenda" born. "'Finding a Common Ground' is an interesting value" they wrote, while sketching out a campaign strategy. Other pillars of the re-election effort include "Standing up for America" (the president's reaction to the bombing of the federal building might serve as a good illustration, they suggested); "Providing Opportunities for All Americans"; "Preserving and Promoting Families"; and, most memorably, "Doing What's Right, Even When it is Unpopular" — a theme that itself was the product of rigorous polling to ensure that it was popular.

Fading tax cuts

THE DOLE ADVISORS of 1996 weren't nearly so sophisticated or confident. But inside that unhappy campaign, a lively debate still boiled about how to present a set of ideas to the public. In August 1996, I arrived at Dole headquarters to help coordinate the rollout of his economic plan and to oversee the speeches he would deliver during the critical final 10 weeks. What immediately struck me was how little debate there was inside the campaign about the content of Dole's tax plan. The more furious debate was reserved for how much it should be emphasized and how it should be described.

From the August national convention onwards, the small cadre of policy types on the Dole-Kemp campaign argued that the candidate should discuss nothing from Labor Day to election day but his plan for a 15 percent across-the-board tax cut and other economic reforms. We took heart from a brilliant *Wall Street Journal* article by a Canadian, Allan Golombek. In it, he argued that Dole could learn from the recently elected premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, who ran talking incessantly about his tax-cutting plan. By the end of the campaign, the public had become convinced that Harris just might be serious and swept him into office.

But at the senior staff meetings and the endless message meetings, these arguments met with resistance from the core of pollsters and political advi-

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sors who held the reins of power. They cared little about the benefits the tax plan would bring. They pointed out that the tax cut was not selling in focus groups. Women, in particular, did not respond positively to the plan for lower taxes. In the poker game atmosphere of a campaign strategy debate, such focus group data is the equivalent of a royal flush. They had scientific tools to measure the public sentiment. The policy advocates on the other side of the table had merely our instincts and deeply held beliefs about the beneficial effects of lower taxes.

And so, by mid-September, the enthusiasm inside the Dole campaign for the candidate's own tax plan was evaporating. It was time to switch themes. Convinced that "the economy" wasn't working as a theme, the strategists rolled out the case for a campaign based on "the moral decline of America," which apparently struck the right note with the "dial groups." Paul Manafort, a veteran Republican campaign strategist, laid out a scenario in a September memo to leaders of the Dole campaign that captures the way many modern strategists view the construction of a candidate's message:

> The reason for the umbrella theme of moral decline . . . is three-fold:
>
> 1. A majority of the electorate believe there is a moral crisis in America.
>
> 2. The backdoor of moral decline is the character issue . . . .
>
> 3. It is an opportunity to employ new and meaningful language.

It is hard to see how a message might emerge from these observations, and in truth, "moral decline" was another short-lived Dole campaign theme. It's not that those of us who believed that tax cuts should be the centerpiece of Dole's campaign disagreed with the notion that one of our candidate's strengths over Clinton was his moral character. But as a campaign theme, unattached to any particular agenda, moral decline struck us as a hopeless form of sentimentalism. It was more evidence of the rudderless nature of the campaign and, more painfully, of how a sound platform of tax cuts found itself at odds with a tired and uninspiring call to *do something* about the nation's moral crisis.

Ours was a losing battle, and we were certainly not the first to see the traditional Republican crusade for lower taxes trampled by a more diluted, less meaningful campaign theme. In trying to defeat Dole during the early primaries that year, Steve Forbes launched a highly unconventional campaign in which a dramatic policy initiative — the flat tax — was the heart of the message. For a moment, Forbes seemed to vindicate the belief that bold policy initiatives make the best campaigns. But by the time the Forbes campaign of 1996 had arrived in New Hampshire, national polls were showing that his far-reaching tax reform policy, though galvanizing the support of some voters, was hurting him with still more. That invited Forbes's competitors to pile on. (The candidate I was working for at the time, Lamar Alexander, seemed to open the flood gates when, during a candidate debate in Des

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Moines, he dubbed the Forbes plan "nutty." Further debate about the flat tax seemed to end that night.)

During the current election cycle, Forbes is running again. But notably, the flat tax, while still part of his repertoire, is no longer the spearhead of his campaign. It has been replaced by a theme — "freedom." That is not a bad theme. It is certainly an admirable and sincere message from a free-marketeer like Forbes. Still, we are left to wonder why a candidate who embraces such a distinct set of ideas has opted to emphasize something as open-ended as freedom, rather than the specific steps he will take to enhance it when he is president. Does it make him a better candidate, or merely a less controversial one?

Reagan's 1980 exceptionalism

As WITH SO MANY THINGS in politics, Ronald Reagan proves to be an exception. His 1980 campaign was the last national campaign in which ideas overshadowed general sentiments. On that campaign, his chief strategist was Richard Wirthlin, perhaps the most influential Republican pollster of the past 20 years. But despite his deep faith in the ability to gauge public opinion, the campaign seemed to be directed more by Reagan's core beliefs and policy preferences than by any set of numbers.

On the road, Reagan spoke to reporters at length about supply-side economics and his theory about the cause of inflation. In speeches he explained, quite elaborately, how the genesis of the recent energy crisis was to be found in Nixon's wage and price control policy. His stories about "welfare queens," much maligned by the left, may have been oversimplified or even exaggerated. But they took dead aim at the perverse incentives of federal welfare policy. No politician had ever spoken like that. On the stump he stirred up crowds by suggesting, "if we can get the federal government out of our classrooms, maybe we can get God back in." On foreign policy, he promised "no more Taiwans."

Reagan's uncompromising attack on status quo policy is exactly the sort of rhetoric that would make today's strategists nervous. Indeed, it seemed as if Reagan deliberately pursued the controversies that politicians are now advised to avoid. In her book on the 1980 campaign, reporter Elizabeth Drew unwittingly touched on what may have been Reagan's secret strength. "Reagan picks at things that are bothering people, making them angry," she wrote. "He talks in a soothing style, but he is not a soothing force."

Inside the Reagan campaign, the absence of Reagan's soothing qualities bothered no one. In Wirthlin's memos to Reagan, Ed Meese, and Bill Casey, we never read advice suggesting the candidate avoid the prickly specifics of his ideas. To be sure, the memos from Wirthlin are full of verbose advice about the need to demonstrate leadership and decisiveness. But what is most

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striking is how closely the memos focus on specific and sometimes quite complex policy matters. The campaign was deliberately structured around key policy issues, including inflation, unemployment, the energy crisis, and the recession — not exactly the vague, inspirational messages preferred by today's pollsters.

Wirthlin never pretended to be a policy expert, but he understood the centrality of policy to Reagan's quest for the presidency. And so, in an August 1980 memo, he worried that a detailed speech was needed to explain how tax cuts and defense spending could still lead to a balanced budget. He also suggested a foreign policy speech that would stay away from defense issues and lay the groundwork for a Reagan "peace plan." When Reagan was to travel to Mexico with his wife for three weeks of vacation in June 1980, Wirthlin suggested that a visit to President Lopez Portillo should be included to help promote the candidate's "North American Accord" — the policy proposal that later became the NAFTA agreement.

Themes create a mood for the political moment, but policy frames a national conversation.

Unlike the self-serving memos sent by today's strategists, the advice of the Reagan team in 1980 was harnessed to a policy vision embraced by the candidate. The need for specificity was stressed repeatedly. (In one note, Bill Casey reminded his candidate always to give *two* justifications for every policy proposal.) There were no suggestions on how to shape a message for the middle class or convey a set of undefined values, no effort to advance policy purely to buttress some larger idea. And although Reagan, a former Democrat, was clearly aware of a swing group of ethnic, Southern, and working class Democrats to whom he might appeal, Wirthlin never offered schemes to pander to this constituency. Reagan's proposals spoke for themselves and were an end in themselves.

To be sure, there were many factions in the Reagan campaign that tried to suppress his natural affinity for dramatic policy changes. Campaign manager John Sears sought to keep Reagan out of Iowa altogether and keep the candidate under wraps. And many of Reagan's claims about economics and social policy were subjected to extravagant press efforts to expose them as wrongheaded or uninformed.

Reagan, however, seemed irrepressible. Much of his political life was devoted to challenging prevailing orthodoxies of both the left and the right. He cheerfully challenged William F. Buckley Jr. about the wisdom of the Panama Canal treaty in the late 1970s. In his 1976 effort to dethrone Gerald Ford as the Republican nominee, he quietly suggested that the Social Security system be reformed so that its funds could be invested in "the industrial might of the nation's economy." Although never fleshed out, this early proposal to think of Social Security in terms of the private market was

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greeted by guffaws from mainstream Republican officials. "Wild-eyed socialism," Elliot Richardson dubbed it. "The best blueprint for backdoor socialism that I have ever heard," added Gerald Ford.

Reagan was undeterred. It was as if he understood that the purpose of public campaigning is to strike at the heart of conventional wisdom. Or perhaps Reagan relished criticism because he realized that specific policy positions, held fast and advocated with conviction, over time become the touchstone of national debate. Reagan's policy advocacy on tax cuts, welfare, free trade, and defense continued to resonate long after the "themes" of his campaign had been forgotten. Everyone believed that "Morning in America" was an evocative theme for Reagan's re-election. But its impact on the political culture pales compared to the idea of cutting taxes by 30 percent, the platform Reagan was running on in the late 1970s. So, too, with his characterization of the Soviet threat, his call for a balanced budget, his mockery of welfare's perverse incentives, or his direct charge to Mikhail Gorbachev while standing in the shadow of the Berlin Wall. Themes create a mood for the political moment, but policy, in the long run, frames a national conversation.

The long-term impact of policy has been seen on other campaigns, too. The details of Bill Clinton's health care plan unveiled during his 1992 campaign, however superficial, ultimately had a greater influence on national debate than all the speeches about "the New Covenant" or "Putting People First." George Bush's pledge of "no new taxes" — about as close to a policy statement as he made during the 1988 campaign — turned out to be far more significant to our national politics than the "kinder, gentler" nation he invoked during his acceptance speech.

Ideas make campaigns and shape the governments that emerge from them. The question that now faces the emerging national campaigns is whether the 2000 presidential race will be fought in the realm of ideas or in the theater of grand themes. Recent history tells us that the campaign strategists will opt for the latter. But recent history also suggests that that choice will lead to unmemorable and unsatisfying campaigns that tell us little about what our next president has in store for us.

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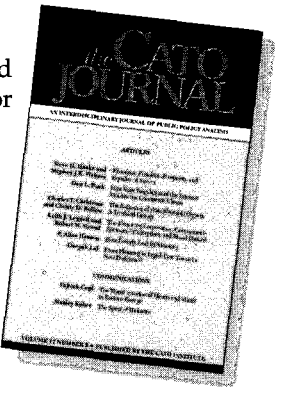

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Helmut Kohl, Giant

By JEFFREY GEDMIN

RONALD REAGAN, Margaret Thatcher, and Pope John Paul II all enjoy firmly established reputations as giants of the late twentieth century. Each will be remembered for unwavering stands that hastened the demise of the Soviet Union and its global empire of anti-democratic power and ideology. When the history of the period is fully sorted out, though, there is a fourth central figure, a leader far less acclaimed in his own time, who is certain to get his due. Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's legacy is truly remarkable — so much so that history will likely regard him as one of the most influential figures of modern Europe.

Pope John Paul II proved to be a remarkable strategist who brilliantly combined symbolism and rhetoric in his effort to de-legitimize Soviet Communism and its conquests. Ronald Reagan rebuilt America's military might and took the offensive against entrenched Soviet power around the globe. Margaret Thatcher was Ronald Reagan's staunchest ally in the struggle against the "evil empire" and will also be remembered as the one who stiffened the spine of an American president when the use of force was needed to counter Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's aggression.

But Helmut Kohl's influence throughout this period was equally important. In a showdown over the deployment of U.S. intermediate-range nuclear missiles in the early 1980s, Kohl reaffirmed Germany's tie to the West at a critical moment in Cold War history. His stand helped reinvigorate Western resolve, which in turn contributed to the Soviet Union's "new thinking" in the mid-1980s. Kohl also unified his country — peacefully, with Soviet consent, as a member of NATO, and all within a year of the breach of the Berlin Wall. Finally, Kohl more than anyone else set on course the historic process

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of Europe's economic and political integration. Even if the endpoint of European unification remains unclear — and the benefits still very much a matter of doubt — the process is under way, and its implications will be profound.

In all three cases, Kohl faced enormous obstacles, tenacious opposition, serious risk, and an almost epic level of uncertainty. Would neutralist forces succeed in pulling Germany away from the West, thereby destroying the Atlantic Alliance and the U.S. commitment to remain engaged in Europe? Were East and West Germany not destined to remain permanently separate, a division born in the aftermath of world war, sealed by the Cold War, and tacitly blessed by a continent wary of German power? Given centuries of division, rancor, and war, how could Europe ever come together in a more permanent, peaceful union? In all three cases, Kohl seized what he (and sometimes he alone) saw as opportunities. And in all three cases, the new facts on the ground he was able to create simply collapsed the seemingly formidable arguments of opponents and doubters. Relatively unsung though the German chancellor of 16 years may be, the Europe of today is a product of his vision and action more than those of any other.

The jaundiced German view

PERHAPS THE LAST PLACE Kohl will get his full and complete due will be in his home country. Kohl's entire career had been one of bumbling, stumbling, and bad breaks; of being tactically outmaneuvered and dismissed by opponents and experts as a dilettante. Franz-Josef Strauss, the legendary and sharp-tongued governor of Bavaria, once said that he was fascinated by Kohl's television appearances because they gave "the impression that anybody could be chancellor."

Biographers described Kohl as dull and unoriginal, a teacher of political platitudes and a politician ever prepared to wait out the hard problems. Comedians and cabaret performers made careers out of Kohl's political missteps and grammatical lapses, all of which somehow seemed to fit with the physical impression of this lumbering, overweight giant (Kohl is 6'4" and weighs well over 300 pounds). Kohl was the man "who ate far more than his fellow citizens, but scarcely carried more weight." The attacks were unrelenting. "Rarely has a West German politician been subjected to so much criticism, humiliation and derision," the *London Times* observed. Strauss once swore that Kohl, at the age of 90, would be writing memoirs entitled "Forty Years as Chancellor Candidate."

Through four consecutive federal elections, Kohl loved seeing what he called "the long faces" of the vanquished on election night. In sweet revenge, he also adorned the wall outside his office in the chancellery in Bonn with the covers of prominent magazines that had falsely forecast his electoral defeat and political demise over the years. Not only did he win, he ran

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Germany for 16 years, eclipsing Konrad Adenauer's 14-year marathon run as the Federal Republic's first chancellor and outlasting such contemporaries as George Bush, François Mitterrand, and Margaret Thatcher.

The ride was often bumpy. There was, at Kohl's urging, Reagan's ill-fated commemorative visit in 1985 to the German military cemetery at Bitburg. The exercise in reconciliation erupted in bitter controversy upon the discovery that in addition to the ordinary German soldiers buried there, so too were members of the SS. There was Kohl's ill-timed comparison of Mikhail Gorbachev — soon to become the chancellor's fast friend — to Nazi propaganda minister Josef Göbbels in 1986. There was Kohl's momentary refusal in 1990 to recognize the inviolability of Germany's eastern border with Poland — which gave the Poles, and the rest of Europe, serious pause during the unification process.

No matter the missteps, though, Kohl had incomparable stamina. He always had a knack for returning to the big ideas. And time and again, he pursued these big ideas assiduously, forever exploiting the hesitation or overconfidence of his opponents.

The missile test

KOHL'S LONGEVITY AS CHANCELLOR owed much to his approach to power. He was, in a word, ruthless. Within the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), rivals were politically extinguished or exiled to provincial posts. Kohl insisted on complete party discipline and loyalty. He always valued loyalty, he often said, over being liked. Even when backbenchers traveled abroad, the chancellor personally signed off on the trip and knew precisely where they were going and with whom they were meeting.

Within the chancellery itself, Kohl gathered around himself a small, close circle of advisors. The circle included Juliane Weber, Kohl's private secretary. She had no formal policy role, but she had the chancellor's ear on everything. The circle also included Kohl's long-time aide and national security advisor Horst Teltschik, who recalls that when Kohl sent him abroad on consultations and Teltschik would ask for instructions, the chancellor would merely say, "you already know what I think." It was a "family business," writes historian Iring Fetscher, "where emotional and personal ties were more important than anything else."

Notwithstanding the calculating power politician who controlled his party with an iron grip, Kohl's public persona was another matter. Kohl's personal style, his preferences — even his appearance, perhaps — represented a down-to-earth predictability, comfort, and affluence that ordinary Germans seemed to crave. Charles Lane once argued, half-seriously, in the *New Republic* that Kohl won elections because he was so fat. Vote for me, went the subliminal message, and you, too, will be satisfied and secure.

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There may be something to this. Kohl epitomized that untranslatable German coziness known as *Gemütlichkeit*.

The chancellor adored devouring platefuls of his favorite Rheinpfalz specialty, *Saumagen* (stuffed pig's belly). He liked speaking in his regional *Pfälzisch* dialect. He slipped into his favorite, well-worn cardigan every chance he got. Visitors often described his family home in Oggersheim near Ludwigshafen as perfectly tidy, dust-free, and neat — right down to the pajamas hanging in the closet, pressed neatly, and folded on hangers. He and wife Hannelore's favorite excursion was to Wolfgangsee in neighboring, German-speaking Austria. (Kohl speaks no language but German.) By one count, the couple had vacationed there 27 times in a row. Straightforward, safe, and utterly *bürgerlich*, Kohl had the touch. And it always seemed to work with voters on election day.

For all his down-to-earth folksiness, Kohl was never very popular with the German people.

For all his down-to-earth folksiness and popular habits, Kohl was never very popular with the German people when ranked against contemporaries. In response, he liked to say he was interested in winning elections, not popularity contests, although it had to have annoyed him that his smooth foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, always ranked higher in the polls.

The fact that Kohl was never much tempted by populism served him well. In the early 1980s, a powerful anti-American, anti-war populist movement swept across Europe, threatening to derail the deployment of U.S. Pershing and cruise missiles. Many a West German politician was going wobbly because of public opposition to the Pershings. And far more was at stake for the Atlantic Alliance than just new missiles.

By the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union had surpassed the United States in what was accepted at the time as a key measure of global nuclear strength: strategic launchers. Soviet expansion was on the march. Pro-Moscow regimes were sprouting like mushrooms from East Asia to Africa to Latin America. President Carter was contemptuously dismissing America's "inordinate fear" of communism, while his secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, explained that Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and the American president shared "similar dreams" for their nations. In Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union was preparing to gain an additional edge by deploying a new generation of intermediate-range weapons: the SS-20 missile, capable of striking the United States' NATO allies. The West was in retreat. Literally. A Presidential Review Memorandum leaked to the press in August 1977 suggested that, in the case of a Warsaw Pact attack, NATO troops might need to fall back to the Rhine before regrouping for a counterattack.

Kohl's predecessor, Social Democrat Helmut Schmidt, recognized the

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threat and helped coordinate a response to the increasing imbalance. Schmidt was one of the originators of a two-track strategy to deal with the SS-20s, according to which the new American missiles would be deployed while negotiators simultaneously sought the reduction or elimination of this class of weapon. NATO's 1979 decision to deploy some 500 cruise and Pershing missiles quickly emerged as the focal point of a ferocious debate in Western Europe. As Josef Joffe of the German daily *Süddeustche Zeitung* puts it, the debate may have been argued in the "language of nuclear weapons" but was, at its core, about politics.

At stake was whether the bond between America and Europe would be affirmed or ruptured at a critical moment in Alliance history; whether Soviet intimidation would be checked or appeased at the crossroads of the East-West standoff; and whether the Western democracies would summon the political and moral resources needed to continue fighting the Cold War. The outcome was far from certain.

While Jimmy Carter led the United States, the Europeans were wallowing in their own malaise. The supposed "moral equivalence" of the two superpowers was the intellectual fashion of the day. And in the front-line state, Germany, there was massive resistance to the deployment of new American missiles. Leading German intellectuals urged their country to become the peacemaker between East and West — to drive for independence from the two opposing blocs. Significant segments of public opinion across Europe were becoming convinced that their continent would turn into "a shooting gallery" for the superpowers. Millions of protesters took to the streets. Nowhere was the intensity of debate as raw, nor the stakes as high, as they were in Germany. Hundreds of thousands descended on Bonn in 1981 and 1982. Their ranks included trade unionists, church activists, doctors, lawyers, even delegations from the German military and groups from Kohl's CDU.

The German media provided their own tireless contribution to the campaign. Rudolf Augstein, publisher of the popular weekly *Der Spiegel*, saw "no principle difference" between Soviet politburo meetings and the political discussions among Western governments. A senior editor at another popular weekly, *Stern*, published a book entitled *Do the Russians Want War?*, in which the author argued that the Soviets had every right to fear American aggression.

Reagan's election in 1980 gave the peace movement an enemy against whom to rally. Petra Kelly, a leader of Germany's new Greens, suggested that the West's nuclear codes be encased in the heart of a child so Reagan would have to rip open the child's heart when he was ready to begin his nuclear war. It was a time of growing demonstrations, blockades, human chains, and death's-head costumes. The memories of terrorism at the hands of the Baader-Meinhof gang were vivid. Members of Germany's peace movement threatened to make the country "ungovernable." At times, the prospect did not look unachievable.

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Because of his pro-missile stance, Schmidt was becoming isolated within his own party. Members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had fallen prey to Soviet and East German propaganda, which pleaded with Germans to protect the continent from "a nuclear Auschwitz." In turn, leading Social Democrats advocated unilateral disarmament and a nuclear-free Europe. Schmidt's party colleague Egon Bahr called for a "security partnership" with the Soviet Union. In the run-up to the 1983 general elections, the Social Democrats experimented with the anti-missile slogan "In the German Interest," suggesting a direct clash with American and NATO interests. While Schmidt argued vehemently that no authentic peace policy could "overlook the contradiction between the system of free democracies and Communist dictatorship," his party turned a deaf ear. Schmidt's demise came about, at least in part, because he was unable to stem the sprawling anti-nuclear revolt.

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This was the climate in which Kohl became chancellor in October 1982, after a no-confidence vote against Schmidt. The onslaught of neutralism, anti-nuclear pacifism, and outright anti-Americanism he inherited was formidable, and still on the rise. Kohl, the former governor of Rhineland-Palatinate, was a *tabula rasa* on the subject of foreign policy. His knowledge and experience seemed trivial in comparison with those of his predecessor. Kohl came from the provinces, from the land-locked Rhineland region, and was taunted by critics as an inexperienced country bumpkin, a *Provenzler*. It made matters no easier that Kohl lacked the majority government Margaret Thatcher had in Great Britain and was forced to rule in a coalition that continued to include Schmidt's dovish foreign minister, Genscher. Guided by instinct and conviction, though, Kohl seemed to grasp from the outset what was most important.

The new chancellor understood the horror of war better than many of the younger peace activists themselves. Growing up during World War II, Kohl personally experienced most of the 124 allied air attacks on his hometown of Ludwigshafen — 40,000 explosive bombs and 800,000 incendiary bombs delivered in all. Eighty percent of the city was destroyed. Kohl also understood the dangers of social upheaval. The demise of the Weimar Republic in the early 1930s demonstrated compellingly how lethal political and social fragmentation could be to German democracy. And Kohl saw how the euromissile debate was tearing at the fabric of West German society.

Yet Kohl remained unyielding in the conviction that the missiles were necessary. They were needed for military reasons, as a countermeasure to the Soviet SS-20s. They were also needed, however, as an unmistakable affirmation of Germany's commitment to the Alliance and the Federal Republic's

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integration in the West. In standing firm, Kohl confronted the Soviets — and the Social Democrats, the Greens, the peace movement, the intellectuals and academics, the nationalists on the German Right, and the media. He had to face down dissent in his own party, too, as some CDU members had themselves become agitated about public opinion. He insisted there was a difference between a populist movement and a popular majority. Germany would be governed from the Bundestag, and not from the streets, he repeated adamantly.

Kohl's instincts were validated by German voters at the polls in 1983. The election focused on two issues: unemployment and nuclear weapons. An influx of visitors from Washington and Paris — and from Moscow — underscored the importance of the latter issue as seen from abroad. Mitterrand tried to offer Kohl support through an address to the German Bundestag. Kohl ran on a staunchly pro-West, pro-missile platform. The choice voters had was unambiguous. Kohl won — as did Margaret Thatcher that year in Britain, where Labor took its worst defeat since 1918. Their anti-nuclear, anti-American rivals did not reflect majority opinion. The debate continued, but Kohl's election meant that the Pershing missiles could begin deploying. Leaving nothing to chance, the first arrived within 24 hours. "To the surprise of Soviet leaders and even of many Western leaders, [West Germany] successfully resisted Soviet pressures," writes Jeffrey Herd in *War by Other Means*.

In his memoirs, Kohl remembers the euromissile debate as "one of the most dramatic in German postwar history." It was also one of the most dramatic in Cold War history. The deployment meant that the Soviets had lost a crucial opportunity. "We knew how sorely tested West Germany's loyalty to NATO was at that time," East German spymaster Markus Wolf recalls in his autobiography. According to Kohl, "Gorbachev himself" would later tell the German leader "that the steadfastness of NATO in this decision substantially contributed to the 'new thinking' in the Kremlin." It was one of many factors, to be sure. The Soviet economy was imploding by the mid-1980s. Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative was vexing the Kremlin. It is nearly certain, though, that had the alliance split over the euromissiles, NATO would have suffered a devastating, perhaps fatal, blow, and the Cold War would have taken a dangerously inauspicious turn.

The road to unification

MARGARET THATCHER HAD A HABIT of lecturing Helmut Kohl. Endlessly, according to him. He could never get a word in edgewise, Kohl recounts in his memoirs. In her eyes, Kohl was guilty of an "exaggerated" coziness. He was too *gemütlich*, she thought. What's more, he was rude. Thatcher was apparently forever miffed after a meeting with Kohl once in Salzburg, when he suddenly informed her that he

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had to interrupt their conversation to dash to another appointment. A few minutes later, Thatcher is said to have spotted the chancellor sitting in a sidewalk cafe drinking his coffee and devouring a mammoth cream pastry.

The story may be apocryphal, but it is a fact that Thatcher and Kohl never got along. They did stand together through the end of the Cold War. But things changed drastically once the Berlin Wall came down. On November 10, 1989, the day after the Wall fell, Kohl telephoned Thatcher to bring her up to date on the momentous events. Thatcher coolly recommended that Kohl call Gorbachev. The Soviet leader would explain to the chancellor why unification was out of the question. It was clear from the outset that Thatcher had no intention of helping Kohl unify Germany. Nor would she ever share his enthusiasm for the economic and political unification of Europe.

West German attitudes in the late 1980s were becoming less favorable to Washington.

The British prime minister was right about the Soviet view of unification. She was also right about the general mood in Europe in late 1989. Nearly everyone opposed unification. The Poles were visibly nervous, the Dutch predictably against. French President Mitterrand — in keeping with the old adage that such was the French affection for Germany, they were glad to have two of them — turned up in East Berlin before Christmas to do his bit to shore up the communist regime. Like Thatcher, Mitterrand feared upsetting the balance of power in Europe. Similarly, he worried about what a resurgent Germany might be like.

Even the Americans were initially reluctant. There had been concerns on the other side of the Atlantic, once again, about whether the Germans were drifting away, this time seduced by the siren call of Gorbo-mania. Kohl may have succeeded in getting the American missiles deployed in Germany in the first half of the decade, but in the last half of the 1980s, harsh criticism of the United States and its posture in arms control talks was manifest throughout Western Europe. In West Germany, attitudes were becoming generally less favorable to Washington, with a majority of West Germans in some polls supporting cooperation equally with the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1988, Kohl had visited Moscow, accompanied by five cabinet ministers, 70 business and banking leaders, and a $1.7 billion bank line of credit for exports to Reagan's evil empire. The trip raised eyebrows in Washington.

If Kohl wanted unification the following year, he would hardly be pushing on an open door. The obstacles were daunting, including at home. Some SPD oppositionists were ambivalent. Berlin's mayor, Walter Momper, insisted on describing the November 9, 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall as "a day of seeing each other again," studiously staying clear of unification talk. Others, like party leader Oskar Lafontaine, opposed unification outright, complaining

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loudly about West German arrogance — and the costs of an eventual merger. Public opinion was hesitant. Kohl's own foreign ministry advocated a "go-slow" approach.

Like nearly everything else in his career, Kohl's own public stance on unification had been anything but smooth and consistent over the years. His early speeches did not mention the topic. When he referred to the "German people," clearly he was talking only about the citizens of West Germany. In the 1970s, Kohl adopted the language of détente and Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Unification talk was out of fashion, considered overly provocative and highly politically incorrect by leading Social Democrats and mainstream intellectuals. Many even fought for full recognition of the East German state and the abolition of "antiquated" institutions like the Salzgitter Center, the archive for documentary evidence of East German human rights abuses.

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Kohl never went to such an extreme. He clearly wanted Germans to benefit, however, from the small-scale "human improvements" that the East German regime was bestowing. The East Germans used human rights as their Soviet patrons did: as barter for Western technology, trade, aid, and enhanced political legitimacy. In German-German relations, Bonn's largess helped to increase telephone contacts for ordinary citizens. Travel opportunities for East Germans to the imperialist neighbor expanded, albeit in limited and carefully controlled circumstances. West German authorities were permitted to purchase in greater volume the freedom of East German political prisoners, who were shipped to the border in exchange for hard currency.

Like the German Left, Kohl also succumbed to some of *Ostpolitik*'s dangers. In 1987, for instance, Kohl received East German dictator Erich Honecker in Bonn, thus assisting communist Germany in taking an unprecedented and desperately coveted step in its ongoing campaign for legitimacy. To give Kohl his due, however, he never strayed far. In one of his first trips to Moscow as chancellor, he informed Yuri Andropov that he was determined to accept the deployment of American missiles — and that he remained fully dedicated to the goal of German unification; it was an icy visit. During Honecker's West German trip, Kohl insisted on broaching the issue, to his guest's complete discomfort and chagrin.

Nevertheless, it was not surprising, in the weeks before and the days immediately after the breach of the Wall in Berlin, that Kohl proceeded cautiously. Mitterrand noticed. So did the Poles. Lech Walesa had shocked Kohl during a visit by the chancellor to Warsaw just before the fall of the wall with the prediction that unification was imminent. No one in Kohl's inner circle had forecast as boldly as Walesa. Kohl himself had conceded just a

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year earlier that he did not expect to see unification during his lifetime. Suddenly, the chancellor was beginning to grasp what was at stake.

On November 28, 1989, three weeks after East Germany's border was opened, Kohl stunned the Bundestag — and the world — by unveiling a 10-point plan for German unity. There were no opinion polls or focus groups to test the political popularity of unification. Kohl simply went forward.

He chose not to inform the allies. Nor did he share the plan with his foreign minister, whose habit it had often been either to steal the limelight or to dilute the chancellor's position. He ordered that the text of the speech be sent to President Bush as it was being delivered, accompanied by a detailed note explaining what he was trying to do. Kohl sought a confederation and, if the Germans so wished, he gently suggested, the eventual unification of the two German states. The Soviets, the French, the British — they were all unhappy with the chancellor's initiative. Even the Americans felt somewhat uneasy, although they quickly backed Kohl unambiguously. Kohl had set the agenda, outflanking opponents at home and clarifying Germany's ambitions for the international community.

Unification quickly gained unstoppable momentum. By winter, 3 million to 5 million East Germans were sitting on packed suitcases, West German authorities estimated, ready to come west if German democracy and the D-mark did not come to them. In the end, *they* drove the process. *They* determined the pace. But it had been Kohl who had made unification politically conceivable and acceptable. He did so by keeping his country in NATO and by making it clear over the next few months that he would wrap the new Germany as tightly as he could in the mantle of Europe. The Soviets pushed hard against NATO membership for the united Germany. Kohl's foreign minister may have had his own ideas; the U.S. had intelligence reports suggesting that Genscher envisaged, with Germany's coming unification, the end of the alliance. But Kohl prevailed.

Kohl's "*Europapolitik*"

If other Europeans were wary of a united Germany, it was a wariness shared first and foremost by Kohl himself. He was keenly concerned that the devils of his country's past might re-emerge. He never really trusted Germany. And he saw the only possible solution as Germany's elaborate and manifold integration into Europe. This was Kohl's *Europapolitik*, the political project closest to his heart and the progress toward which was probably his proudest achievement in office.

"Ever closer" union had been always part of the European Community's ethos. In fact, European unity had been the idea of princes and poets, statesmen and philosophers for centuries. If Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman were the architects of the modern post-World War II quest for European unification, then François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl became the men

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who translated the design into reality. For Kohl, German unification and European unification were, as he liked to put it, two sides of the same coin.

Bismarck once said that he often found the word "Europe" in "the mouths of those politicians who wanted from other powers something they did not dare to demand in their own name." And so it was to an extent in modern Europe, too. For some, European unity was the continent's answer, for example, to globalization. As the nation-state withered away, went the logic, a European Union (E.U.) that pooled resources and sovereignty would become a formidable transnational actor well positioned to represent Europe's political and economic interests in the world. For others, such as Europe's smaller countries, European unity was the key to maximizing their own leverage and influence. They feared being overrun or ignored by the major powers on the continent, especially Germany and to a lesser degree France, the UK, and Italy. They believed that a unified Europe would at least assure them a place at the table.

Kohl would argue that deeper integration would embed Germany in Europe.

For the French, ceding sovereignty to supranational European institutions represented an immense gamble. To avoid being dominated by its neighbor across the Rhine, Paris has made the calculation that it will gain a net advantage in its relationship with Berlin, the Germans having relinquished their cherished D-mark in this European bargain and given up the hegemony of the Bundesbank. European Commission President Jacques Delors wrote once that "creating Europe is a way of regaining that room for maneuver necessary for 'a certain idea of France.' "

For his part, Kohl always accepted French vanity and ambition, just as he felt obliged to respect European, especially French, fears about Germany. Adenauer had once counseled Kohl that in dealing with France he should always bow once to the German flag and twice to the French. And so Kohl would argue that deeper integration would indeed embed Germany in Europe, prevent the re-nationalization of German foreign policy, and, in turn, make German power more palatable for its neighbors.

This did not mean relinquishing German national interests. On the contrary, it meant that the postwar Federal Republic of Germany had become particularly adept at pursuing its interests, as Timothy Garton Ash argues in his book, *In Europe's Name*. In fact, Kohl made European economic and political union a priority for German foreign policy a decade ago precisely because he understood Germany's ceding of sovereignty as a necessary price to pay for national unity.

The campaign for a single European currency — an initiative that had always been seen by virtually all its proponents as a step toward greater political integration — formally began in 1969. But it was the Maastricht

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Treaty, negotiated in 1991 and promoted by Kohl and his French allies, that pushed the process and accompanying debate to center stage.

Once again, Kohl was swimming against the stream. True, unlike the euromissile debate, Kohl's campaign for economic and political union faced no appreciable resistance from any of the mainstream political parties in Germany. But not everyone could understand why Germany, or for that matter others, would give up so much for an uncertain future. In France, the Maastricht Treaty passed by referendum, but it did so by a wafer-thin margin. In Denmark, it failed. In Germany, it would have likely failed as well, had it ever been put to the test. "D-mark nationalism" had become a permissible sort of ersatz patriotism for the Germans after the trauma of the Holocaust and World War II. They loved the mighty mark as a symbol of achievement, rebuilding, and stability. Kohl faced formidable criticism in the media. A range of publications, from the tabloids to popular magazines like *Der Spiegel* to the conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, traditionally very pro-Kohl, all raised questions about the chancellor's ambition to trade the stable D-mark for a new and untested European currency. It was no surprise that Italians in great number favored giving up the lira. They wanted to import monetary virtue and export traditional Italian vice. The Germans feared just the opposite. Not surprisingly, Germany's central bankers started as reluctant participants in Kohl's politically motivated project.

Not everyone could understand why Germany would give up so much for an uncertain future.

In Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher emerged as the strongest opponent of "Europe." Thatcher feared that a stronger, more deeply integrated E.U. would reflect German and French preferences in economic matters and be at fundamental odds with Anglo-Saxon tastes. She also contended, more importantly perhaps, that Germany would inevitably dominate such a union, and that such dominance would invariably give rise to the malign nationalism Helmut Kohl sought to make extinct. Kohl was unpersuaded; he remained unwavering in his commitment to economic and political union. Step by step, he outmaneuvered the British prime minister.

Thatcher worked assiduously and in detail to block Kohl's plans. She tried to create tactical alliances, including with members of Kohl's own euroskeptical Bundesbank. Karl Otto Pöhl, the Bundesbank's president, from time to time was outspokenly critical of European monetary union. By quoting Pöhl at one European Community meeting, Thatcher was successful in getting mention of a European Central Bank removed from the text of a communiqué. Even such little victories were hard for her to achieve. Thatcher disliked Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, but failed to convince Kohl or the French to favor her candidate for the

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Commission, the Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, who shared at least some of Thatcher's Euro-skepticism. In the 1980s, she had tried to block reference to European Monetary Union in the Single European Act. Her efforts were in vain. Later, she would also oppose the establishment of an E.U. committee to report on monetary union and try, once again unsuccessfully, to undermine its formation.

All the while, Kohl was winning support from the United States and, more important, working closely in tandem with the French, whose political clout is central to E.U. decision making. He never gave up trying to persuade Thatcher of the logic of his design. On a private visit once to Kohl's home near Ludwigshafen — an invitation that Kohl had pressed on the British prime minister — Thatcher's foreign affairs advisor Charles Powell became the object of Kohl's sermon. Kohl wanted Thatcher to see him on his home ground, close to the border of France, deep in the heart of continental European history and conflict. And on an excursion to the cathedral in Speyer, Kohl took Powell aside, behind a tomb in the crypt, to explain his case for merging Germany's identity into that of a wider Europe. Kohl really was a good European, he wanted to explain. No one could doubt the sincerity of Kohl's objectives. As Henrik Bering writes in his new biography of the German leader, *Helmut Kohl*, his "goal was [always] to break the pattern of destructive nationalism and war in Europe."

Whether the euro succeeds over time, it was another remarkable achievement for Kohl.

Kohl never convinced Thatcher of this means. Powell says he was prepared to report the conversation to Prime Minister Thatcher when they got on the plane, but stopped when Mrs. Thatcher flopped onto her seat, flung off her shoes, and proclaimed: "My God is he German!" By May 1998, it simply didn't matter any more. Thatcher was gone, the German public — and the Bundesbank — had reconciled to the coming reality of a single European currency, and across Europe, Kohl had his allies firmly in place. Whether the euro succeeds over time economically or politically, it was another remarkable achievement for Kohl.

Abroad and at home

MONETARY UNION was also an achievement about which, at the time he stood for election last year, scarcely an ordinary German seemed to care. While settling the big strategic questions, Kohl had failed to tackle other issues. In 1998, questions about the euro and any eventual political union remained distant, abstract and overly complicated for most Germans.

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Kohl's domestic record, on the other hand, was not complicated at all, and the facts were catching up with him. Under his leadership, Germany moved from economic pacesetter in the 1980s to battered and bloated welfare state in the 1990s. Kohl repeatedly failed to introduce reforms in the Germany economy that industry and the younger mavericks of his own CDU were urging on him. Germany was saddled with double-digit unemployment. The welfare state needed slimming down. Adding insult to injury, poor Helmut Kohl had to endure the wrath of his struggling countrymen in eastern Germany. He had led them out of communism and into the Western fold; but had also prematurely promised "blooming landscapes" in the east within three or four years of unification. Amidst rumors of the unthinkable — a revolt against the chancellor within the CDU — Kohl's perennial and formidable campaign machine this time visibly staggered toward the finish line of his last election.

And so it was that Kohl's career as chancellor finished, in a sense, as it began. When he arrived at CDU headquarters in Bonn on election night last September, the halls were packed with the party faithful, drinking their beer and nibbling on snacks. The outcome was already clear. The feeling was anti-climactic. The mood was, well, upbeat. It was as if they had known in advance and were already prepared to move on.

Lackluster and stumbling a bit, *Der Dicke* ("the fat one") had run out of gas. His concession speech referred to the big battles of the past. In truth, Kohl had lost the skirmishes, many of them. He had stumbled at times, terribly. But he tackled the big things mightily. Kohl had helped win the Cold War. He reunified his country. He won the battle over the euro. It was a remarkable run, those 16 years. In time, the world, the historians, even the Germans themselves will come to acknowledge the greatness of Helmut Kohl.

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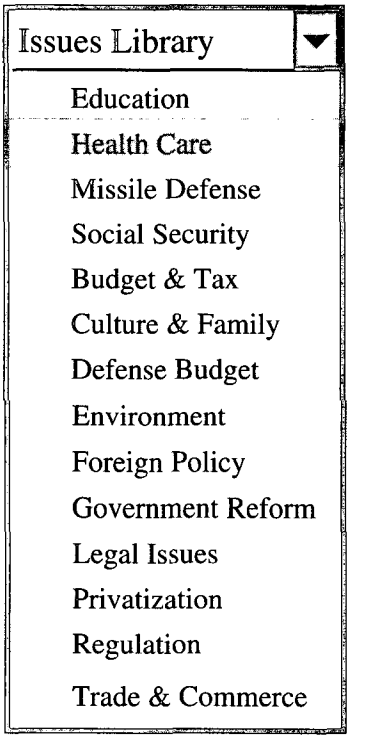

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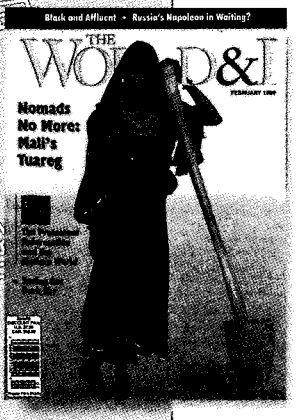

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The Underestimated Chancellor

Helmut Kohl's Long List of Enemies

By HENRIK BERING

HELMUT KOHL'S SOLIDITY, lack of pretension, essential *Bürgerlichkeit*, may have made him a vote-getter with middle-class Germans, but it did nothing to endear him to the German media and intelligentsia. Even though he was regarded as belonging to the more liberal wing of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) when he came to power in 1982, and even though in just about every other country Kohl would have been regarded essentially as a Social Democrat, his critics at home lost no time painting him a black reactionary.

The political spectrum on the right in Germany is extremely narrow. Even the bourgeois right has been taboo since World War II. There are no similar limitations on the left side of the spectrum, where it is perfectly respectable to be Trotskyite, Spartakist, anarchist, or other exotic persuasions. For instance, a fierce public outcry arose when, at the height of the terrorist wave in the 1970s, the Bundestag passed a law designed to prevent left-wing terrorist sympathizers from holding public sector jobs. (It should be emphasized that this law was introduced by a Social Democratic–led government.) Since there is no real right in Germany, the left had to invent one, and so they seized on Helmut Kohl.

According to Christoph Stölzl, director of the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin, the 1960s and 1970s in Germany were a time of great illusions and even greater delusions. The protest movement of the day was completely unconnected to reality. Indeed, for all its bloody deeds, the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group was straight out of the nineteenth century

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Henrik Bering is author of Helmut Kohl *(Regnery), from which this article is excerpted with permission.*

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German Romantic school. While the Red Army Faction and its sympathizers obviously constituted an extremely small group, some of their political views resonated in the youth movement at large (and among older radicals as well). If Americans think that the 1960s were bad, the generational conflict that beset Germany was every bit as ferocious. This postwar generation rose up with a vengeance against its parents, who, because of the Nazi era, commanded no moral authority.

German society reacted to the challenge from the radicals not with counterarguments but with well-intentioned, if misplaced, attempts to understand their bitterness and fury. The youth movement, in return, showed its lack of appreciation immediately by labeling this attitude "repressive tolerance." Respected older intellectual figures like Heinrich Böll went so far as to question the right of the republic to defend itself against terrorism. Böll viewed the violence of terrorists such as Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader as less worrisome than "the lies and propaganda of the fascist press."

Equally preposterously, people on the left in Germany identified with the civil rights movement in America, deluding themselves that the situation in Germany somehow resembled that of the United States. The fact that there were no blacks in Germany, and that the Turkish guest workers who were there had come of their own volition and desperately wanted to stay (and bring their families as well) seemed of minor importance.

But they did not stop here; they identified with the poor downtrodden wherever they thought they could find them in the world. As Dorethea Sölle, a church activist, put it at a 1983 conference of the Council of Christian Churches in Canada: "Our San Salvador is in militarist West Germany, which is the place where our struggle should proceed. This is our Vietnam, our Soweto, our San Salvador, our battlefield for justice and peace."

Return to normal

Into this morass Helmut Kohl strode briskly in 1982 with a call for spiritual and moral change, a call that his enemies immediately seized upon. Some ridiculed it, others saw it as a sinister plan to impose a right-wing ideology on Germany. In part, Kohl reacted to his predecessor Helmut Schmidt, who had stated that the job of the chancellor was not to preach moral values, but to implement pragmatic policies. Schmidt had, in fact, called himself the "first civil servant" of the German state, indicative of a rather limited view of the office.

Kohl, for his part, was of the opinion that politics was more than mere pragmatism, that if Germany wanted to keep its position as a leading industrial nation, it had better rediscover some of its traditional values, such as honesty and hard work, freedom and justice, which had made its economic success possible in the first place. To have seen this as rabid right-wing ideology was way off the mark.

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Says Stölzl, "When Kohl in 1982 promised a spiritual and moral change, although he might have wanted more, this meant nothing more than going back to the common sense of the great majority of the population. This was not a conservative revolution."

But even a return to normalcy seemed preposterous to the generation that had been able to indulge its left-wing fantasies while living off the accumulated wealth of its parents, who had rebuilt German prosperity after the war. The reason Kohl aroused such strong antipathy after the left-wing idealist binge of the 1960s and 1970s, according to Stölzl, was that with his solidity and his roots, he reminded everyone of what they were trying to forget — that real life involves work and responsibility, taking care of your children and your family. He spoke not just about freedoms, but also about obligations, not just about rights, but also about duties. Kohl was the embodiment of common sense after years of romanticism and escape.

Kohl quickly became a kind of national dart board for the 1960s generation.

Indeed, Kohl quickly became a kind of national dart board for the 1960s generation. This generation of young men and women who were on the long march through German institutions now found themselves in positions of responsibility, and had long since been tamed; the Volkswagen Beetle and the Velo Solex moped had been exchanged for a Mercedes Benz; the squatters and the activists had moved into their own villas. In a kind of Freudian way, Kohl acted as a surrogate father figure. Pointing a finger at Kohl, every schoolteacher with the liberal news weekly *Die Zeit* under his arm could delude himself that he still belonged to the avant-garde.

Needless to say, the intellectuals and the German media were at the forefront of the assault. As in the United States, German intellectuals and the press tend not to look favorably on conservative politicians for the simple reason that very few writers are conservatives themselves. In Germany, a great majority of the media — some 80 percent — regards Social Democratic and Green positions favorably.

But the phenomenon goes a step further. Despite the country's extensive social welfare net, which is supported by liberals and conservatives alike, being a conservative in Germany is seen by many on the left as not only a sign of mental deficiency but also as something infinitely more sinister. Says Stölzl, "Normal people who believe in law and order in Germany are defined as Nazis. It is nonsense, of course, but there it is."

Some of it comes down to intellectual snobbery. After all, few things will make people repress their own middle-class origins more readily than a university education. Thus from the very beginning Kohl was mocked in the papers. One critic, wheeling out the heavy artillery, labeled the chancellor "an imposition on Germany as a cultural nation."

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Among Germany's heavyweight intellectuals, the most prolific of Kohl's critics was author Günter Grass, whose contempt for Kohl was almost visceral. Of all the self-important German left-wing intellectuals, Grass is surely the most self-important. With his huge drooping moustache, grandfather pipe, and old sweater, Grass looks docile enough. This is, after all, a man who has chosen the snail as his literary emblem. But when the subject turned to Helmut Kohl and the state of Germany democracy, the snail became apoplectic.

Like his fellow author, the late Heinrich Böll, Grass has tended to see postwar Germany as a police state, a sham democracy, "a dictatorship of money" with neo-Nazis about to take over any minute, if they have not already done so. One critic perceptively compared Grass's own political development, or rather stuntedness, to that of the hero of his most famous book, *The Tin Drum*, the boy Oscar Matzerath, who willed himself to stop growing when the Nazis took over and witnessed the cruelties of war from his child's perspective while hammering away on his drum. Grass himself is forever stuck in the twilight shadows of the Third Reich, and forever banging his drum about imaginary demons without noticing or being willing to notice that the world around him has changed.

Among the print media in postwar Germany, the most influential has been the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, which has routinely portrayed itself as a savior, educator, and guarantor of German democracy, without which Germany could not have returned to the family of respectable nations. *Der Spiegel* held this position for decades, though with time it has lost some of its impact due to competition from other publications. But with a circulation of about 1 million, it cannot be overlooked. Most politicians are hesitant to challenge it; to be on *Der Spiegel*'s hit list is not a healthy place to be.

Der Spiegel is a prime example of what some call the angst industry in Germany, which is made up of a triad located in Hamburg — *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, and the "human interest" magazine *Stern* — or what Kohl refers to as "the Hamburg complex of the press." In common, they have a highly skeptical attitude toward power, which, given Germany's history, may be reasonable enough. Yet in the case of *Der Spiegel*, skepticism reaches an almost hysterical pitch; any kind of power is suspect, including power exerted within a democracy. In *Der Spiegel* a minor local problem is immediately blown up to be a national crisis, while a national crisis becomes instant *Götterdämmerung*.

Der Spiegel

LICENSED AFTER THE WAR by the British in 1946 and based on the *Time* magazine model, *Der Spiegel* and its founder and publisher Rudolf Augstein soon showed that they had their own political agenda. Openly polemical, fact and opinion mix freely in *Der Spiegel*'s

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pages, and in a time-honored European tradition, sourcing is minimal. You have to take the news on trust.

Despite the publisher's stated nonsocialist views (he is a Free Democrat), *Der Spiegel*'s editorial line is decidedly left of center, with a weakness for environmental affairs. Its style, known as Spiegelese, is instantly recognizable: a cynical, insinuating, sarcastic, and streetwise tone, to which is added a hefty dollop of moral rectitude.

The style is a reflection of the personality of its publisher, a man of restless intellect who has written biographies on figures as diverse as Frederick the Great and Jesus Christ. Coming originally from a strict religious background, against which he rebelled in *A Man Called Jesus* (1972), Rudolf Augstein challenged the historical basis of the Bible and went on to inveigh against reactionary Catholics, who, in his opinion, ran Germany and blocked social change.

Grass has tended to see postwar Germany as a police state, a sham democracy.

On foreign affairs, despite the early British support for the magazine, Augstein remained a German nationalist, which he combined with a deep sympathy for Russia. Always backing the underdog, which in the Cold War he believed to be the Soviet Union (a rather large underdog, one should have thought), he has always been hostile to American power in the world. Early on, Augstein proved himself an ardent enemy of Konrad Adenauer's Western orientation and the integration of Germany into the Western defense alliance.

Augstein was one of the main cheerleaders when in 1969 the Free Democrats formed a government with the Social Democrats. Not surprisingly, his favorite chancellor was Willy Brandt, and *Der Spiegel* became a conveyer belt for his views, especially the opening to the East. In 1974 one of the magazine's editors, Gunther Gauss, was appointed West German representative in East Berlin.

Accordingly, Augstein hit the roof when the Free Democrats switched allegiance in 1982 and threw their weight behind Helmut Kohl. For 16 years, Augstein waged war against Kohl. Kohl once referred to *Der Spiegel* as "representing a Hamburg sewer rather than reality" and advised people "to save their money and enjoy life." Its covers are famous for their depiction of the chancellor; one from 1986 shows a tiny little Kohl figure under a gigantic headline screaming "The Minus Chancellor," while a post-unification cover from 1994 shows his head on a locomotive relentlessly barreling ahead under the headline "The Power Machine."

For two decades Kohl did not grant the magazine an interview, knowing that it would make no difference in the weekly's biased treatment of him. Why help a magazine devoted to his downfall? He even refused to read *Der Spiegel*. As it was still Germany's leading magazine, and hence could not be

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overlooked, he would get around his own ban by leaving the unpleasant task to his press spokesman, who summarized parts for him.

Die Zeit

Compared to *Der Spiegel*, the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* is a much more refined product. It has none of the in-your-face wiseguy tone of *Der Spiegel*, but politically it takes similar positions — liberal-left and Social Democrat — and its editorial line was decidedly anti-Kohl.

Its publisher, Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, the grande dame of German newspapering, came from Germany's old Prussian nobility. She saw her brother and many of her family friends killed after the unsuccessful attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler in 1944. After the war she lost all the family lands in East Prussia and escaped on horseback from the advancing Soviet troops.

Trained as an economist before the war, and nicknamed the Red Countess because of her socialist leanings, she had a way of getting things wrong. When Ludwig Erhard declared the currency reform in 1948, which formed the foundation of Germany's economic rebirth, she immediately pronounced it a "disaster" for Germany.

At heart, despite all her socialist leanings, Dönhoff identified with the kind of nationalism that represents the old Germany, the real Germany within the officer corps. (She has written an elegant and elegiac memoir about her childhood in East Prussia, which, incidentally, Kohl admires.)

Die Zeit's editor-in-chief until 1992 was Theo Sommer. He had been picked decades earlier by Dönhoff as one of her promising young men. Under his stewardship, *Die Zeit* continuously editorialized about how the East German regime was a peace-seeking and well-meaning state that the Federal Republic should help and understand; the paper roundly criticized Helmut Kohl for constantly bringing up the unification issue.

Since unification and the opening of the East German archives, interesting revelations about *Die Zeit*'s editorial practices have surfaced. In 1986 the magazine ran a series of articles about life in East Germany, later published in book form under the title *A Journey Through the Other Germany*. The archives embarrassingly reveal Sommer eagerly agreeing to downplay the significance of the Wall and other unpleasant aspects of life in East Germany and instead stress its stability and full employment. In short, the articles amount to acceptance of the journalistic terms imposed by the East German regime.

A few quotes give the flavor: "Life in the GDR [German Democratic Republic] means life under Erich Honecker. The citizens in the other German State regard him with a quiet kind of reverence. That always comes through in conversations. Honecker carefully avoids any kind of personality cult.... On the other side, a system has been created that in many ways surpasses ours. There is no unemployment. On the contrary, managers com-

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plain over lack of manpower."

The picture emerging from the articles was of a state that was essentially benign and unthreatening, if a little boring. The series was influential in shaping not only West Germans' view of East Germany, but also international opinion. Sommer has since admitted in general terms that his view of East Germany was wrong, but he never apologized for the series.

In all fairness, notes Kohl adviser Wolfgang Bergsdorf, it should perhaps be pointed out that *Die Zeit* was not the only publication that was taken in by the East German line. "There are hundreds of journalists," he says, "who chose to close their eyes and not see the human rights violations committed in the [GDR], all in the interest of defining peace and good relations with those in power."

In his time as prime minister of the Rhineland-Palatinate, he was used to favorable reviews in the local press as an up-and-coming politician, so the onslaught of the national media came as something of a shock. Kohl was known for his "angry glare" at journalists whom he found impertinent, and he took a certain pleasure when the press had to eat its own words.

Eduard Ackermann, who as press secretary occupied an exposed post in the war with the media, recalls, "In the old days, the way a question was phrased could irritate him and throw him off his guard." Over time, he became more equanimous, but this did not prevent him from saying a question was truly stupid if he found it so.

The intellectuals

FOR THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE, it should be remembered that Konrad Adenauer was ridiculed by the intellectuals for having a vocabulary of 500 words. And Kohl was surely no more sensitive than Willy Brandt, who when faced with jokes and media attacks assigned a psychologist in the Chancellery to delve into the mystery of why people would criticize him.

Given all the vitriol expended on him during his years in office, one may wonder how Kohl survived for so long. The answer lay partly in his understanding of and connection to the ordinary German voters and partly in the fact that Kohl was a formidable political tactician and infighter, something that was often not understood by his opponents — until it was too late. "Helmut Kohl's survival skills were highly developed," says Wolfgang Bergsdorf. "If there was a rat that threatened to gnaw the wood of the chair he was sitting on, he could smell that rat right away." Kohl's political enemies and rivals tended to have one thing in common: the belief that they were smarter than he was. For the life of them, they could not understand that he, not they, occupied the chancellor's chair.

Kohl's CDU was full of people who underestimated Kohl and lived to regret it — who woke up one day and found themselves relegated to exile in

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distant and fog-filled provinces in the new eastern Germany. One such was the prime minister of Saxony, Kurt Biedenkopf, a man of great intellect and wit, who fought a series of early battles with Kohl about the direction of the CDU and lost — and harbored a huge grudge. At predictable intervals, Biedenkopf would jump up and down in his palace in Dresden overcome with the injustice of it all.

Another example is Lothar Späth, the once-popular prime minister of Baden-Württemberg and in 1989 considered a serious rival of Kohl. Former U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Burt once asked Späth if he meant to take on the chancellor. "I've thought about it and it scares me," came Späth's reply.

"Why does it scare you?" asked Burt.

"Because on weekends, when he comes down to Baden-Württemberg, and we go around to CDU winefests, he knows more people by name in my state than I do."

He was a grass-roots politician who lived and breathed politics.

Predictably, the Späth challenge never emerged, and Späth went on to become CEO of Jenoptik in Jena, Thuringia. Kohl was not merely the leader who sat in the Chancellery and greeted visiting potentates and other dignitaries, he was a grass-roots politician who lived and breathed politics. "He was not just a wholesaler of politics, he was a retailer, who understood that people plus policies equal politics," notes Richard Burt.

Someone who immediately recognized Kohl's staying power was U.S. Ambassador Vernon Walters, who was appointed to Bonn in the spring of 1989. In one of his very first meetings at the embassy, he ordered every reference in embassy telegrams to the "bumbling and stumbling chancellor" removed. "No one stumbles and bumbles his way into the Chancellery and remains there for 16 years," says Walters. "The competition is very great. A lot of people are looking for that job." Kohl once told Walters, "My enemies have underestimated me since I ran for the city council in Mainz. And they still do it in the federal Chancellery. I hope they continue to do it."

Another key to Kohl's survival was that he was the ultimate party man. He served his way all the way to the top through a long line of positions and knew every aspect of the party, including which closets had skeletons. While all chancellors run the risk of ending up as prisoners of their own staff and the rigid Bonn power structures — political Robinson Crusoes in splendid isolation — Kohl counteracted this by keeping close contact with local party officials at the grass-roots level throughout the country, making him in effect his own main adviser. On important questions he conferred with his friends among the clergy back in Ludwigshafen to get opinions that were not influenced by self-interest.

His favored instrument for doing business was the telephone. Kohl liked

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to call lowly CDU officials throughout small-town Germany with the words "Helmut here, how are things?"— and they would not be the least bit surprised. It was once said of him, and only half in jest, that if he got President George Bush on one line and a party official on the other, he would put Bush on hold.

It was indeed amusing to see how opposition newspapers like *Die Zeit*, on those intermittent occasions when it decided to take the chancellor seriously, managed to make his manner with a telephone sound almost Machiavellian. Like some latter-day Caesare Borgia with a telephone, Kohl was shown plotting and scheming, compartmentalizing people, sucking them dry for knowledge while telling them little, so that in the end only the man at the center of the web had the whole picture. It certainly is a frightening image, for those who are easily frightened.

As is common with politicians whose views journalists do not share and whose success they accordingly do not quite understand, Kohl's career has been dismissed as pure luck — as was, one recalls, Ronald Reagan's. As Kohl himself freely acknowledges, no politician gets anywhere without luck, but it has to be combined with tenacity. Ronald Reagan was not successful in his first attempt to capture the White House.

At a superficial glance Kohl's career on paper may have a certain inevitability to it, but Kohl has seen his share of setbacks. Although in 1976 he scored the second-highest election result in postwar German history, he lost the election just 300,000 votes short of an absolute majority out of 42 million votes. In 1980 Kohl suffered another disappointment when his coalition's candidacy for chancellor instead went to Bavaria's Franz Josef Strauss, Kohl's supposed ally — and always his rival.

The "King of Bavaria"

MORE THAN WITH ANYONE ELSE, Kohl fought with Strauss, also known as the "King of Bavaria," who used to refer to Kohl as a "mere office holder." Strauss's external demeanor of folksiness masked a keen intelligence and a ruthless political ambition. As a former minister of defense and of finance, Strauss commanded respect for his enormous expertise and knowledge, more than Kohl would ever claim for himself. Much of Strauss's analysis of the German economy in the late 1970s and early 1980s was right on the mark. It was the way he sometimes expressed his analysis that scared people away. Similarly, when Strauss started toying with the idea that Germany should have its own nuclear deterrent, a lot of people got rather frightened.

With a gargantuan ego, Strauss was a baroque figure who once described himself as "a Hercules who carried the world on his shoulders." In Strauss's mental universe, Winston Churchill was a quarrelsome politician who owed his career to Adolf Hitler, while Konrad Adenauer was a competent lord

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mayor of a minor town who had been lifted from obscurity after the breakdown of the Third Reich. Strauss was forever bemoaning the fact that he himself lived in such uneventful times, which did not call for the greatness he embodied.

Some of Strauss's resentment of Kohl was due to genuine disagreements over policies and strategy. CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), are both based on Christian values, a much-needed component of political life after the Nazi period. But the CSU generally lies to the right of the CDU on the political spectrum. While Kohl might be considered a middle-of-the-road Democrat in the United States, Strauss could have passed as a Republican. For decades, the two quarreled over every issue, from the economy to *Ostpolitik*, with Strauss demanding more reciprocity from the East Germans.

Strauss could not get used to the idea that somebody other than himself held the title of chancellor.

From Strauss's side, however, the rivalry between the two was in large part a personality clash. Strauss could not quite get used to the idea that somebody other than himself held the title of chancellor. His hatred of Kohl verged on the irrational, and it clearly clouded his political judgment. He never missed an opportunity to vent his contempt for the chancellor.

Kohl and Strauss also differed on election strategy. Strauss always regarded the Free Democrats as untrustworthy and wanted to go for a clear CDU/CSU majority government in the 1980 elections. Kohl meanwhile had learned from his own defeat in 1976 that obtaining a clear majority was not politically feasible and that, therefore, cooperation with the Free Democrats was the only way for the conservatives to regain power.

When Strauss was chosen as chancellor candidate for the 1980 election, Kohl gave him his full backing. Instead of sulking and returning to the Rhineland-Palatinate, Kohl stuck it out, the ultimate party loyalist. Not even Strauss could accuse Kohl of destroying his chances. Accordingly, when Strauss suffered a humiliating defeat, the second worst result in CDU/CSU history, proving once and for all that he was a nonviable candidate, Kohl was there to take over again as chancellor candidate for the opposition in Bonn.

When Kohl became chancellor in 1982, he made it clear to Strauss that the heavyweight ministries such as foreign affairs, finance, and economy would not be an option for him. Instead, Strauss was offered a beefed-up defense portfolio, which he turned down and which he was meant to turn down. Kohl did not want the Wild Man from Bavaria in his cabinet.

Despite the insults, Kohl always tried to have a good working relationship with Strauss because he needed his support to keep the right from joining up with nationalist parties like the Republikaners. According to Ackermann, "Kohl surely clenched his fist in his pocket many times, but he put up with

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it. Easy it wasn't, of course."

Kohl himself, in a moment of exaggerated enthusiasm, once described the relationship with Strauss as a *Männerfreundshaft*, a "friendship among men," but it could best be described as an armed truce. The two would go for long walks in the Bavarian mountains, hashing out pressing issues. Along the route, Strauss would place photographers at strategic locations to document how the chancellor came to Bavaria to seek advice and guidance.

The results of these walks would vary considerably depending on who was doing the retelling. Whereas Kohl usually stressed the picnic aspects of these trips and waxed lyrical about the impressive Bavarian landscape, in the belief that this was a confidential conversation, Strauss invariably claimed to have won some gigantic concession from the chancellor.

When Franz Josef Strauss died in 1988 and was given a funeral worthy of a Bavarian king, Kohl gave a most moving tribute to him. When you have triumphed over people in life, you can afford to be generous at their death.

"Genschman"

THE OMINOUS TERM *Männerfreundshaft* has also been used to describe the other key political relationship in Kohl's career, the one with Hans-Dietrich Genscher, leader of the Free Democrats.

While Genscher's party was still in coalition with the Social Democrats, Kohl started cultivating him, knowing that he would need his support to form a government one day. Kohl needed Genscher in order to have a majority, and Genscher needed Kohl to continue to play a national role after the demise of the Schmidt government. Like all marriages of necessity, it was an uneasy one.

Genscher, whose trademark big ears earned him the nickname "Jumbo" among caricaturists, is an intriguing character. Growing up in the city of Halle in Saxony, during the war Genscher served as a plane spotter at an anti-aircraft battery. He had just completed Pioneer school when the war ended. Genscher was taken prisoner by the Americans and then turned over to the British. When the Western Allies left Saxony, which was to become part of the Soviet Zone, Genscher, rather than taking the offer of going with the British, chose to go back to his mother in Halle, where he went on to study law.

But in 1952 it became clear to Genscher that the law was not highly regarded in the new East German regime. Accordingly, he and a couple of friends packed their suitcases as if going on holiday, went to Berlin, and took the S-Bahn from the Eastern part to the Western part, avoiding the East German ticket control, something that in the days before the Berlin Wall was still possible. From Berlin, he went to Bremen, where he settled and quickly established himself professionally and politically as a member of the Free Democrats.

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During Genscher's time as minister, first as minister of the interior under Brandt, then as foreign minister, Genscher demonstrated an uncanny ability to hog the limelight. He jetted around the world as no German foreign minister had ever done. And Helmut Schmidt once joked that he hardly dared take a holiday for fear that Genscher would jump into his chair.

Genscher assiduously propagated the myth of "Genschman" — the superdiplomat who indefatigably traveled the world in search of peace, the man who invented the "working funeral," as when he held meetings with U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz and his British counterpart, Sir Geoffrey Howe, at the funeral of Pakistani President Zia ul Haq.

For years, Genscher was the most popular politician in Germany, precisely because of his tendency to give a great segment of the population the peace pabulum they so wanted to hear. Once, *Stern* magazine asked its readers, if they were stranded on a desert island with a politician, with whom would they prefer to be stranded? The majority responded: Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

Genscher was popular precisely because of his tendency to give people the peace pabulum they so wanted to hear.

The interdependence between Kohl and Genscher as coalition partners prevented an honest airing of differences; mostly, one has to read between the lines of this long and complicated relationship. Genscher's political survival skills were legendary. One of Henry Kissinger's favorite jokes describes how two German Luftwaffe aircrafts collide somewhere in the Atlantic. Investigators discover that Genscher was aboard both of them. What's more, he survived.

Partly because of Genscher's constant need to keep up the political profile of his tiny party, partly because of his own vanity and personal ambition, which had been strengthened by a long and life-threatening battle with tuberculosis, Genscher quickly started making his own personal foreign policy. This was often at odds with the chancellor's. On several such occasions, Genscher refused to go along, and Kohl had to give in. For instance, when in 1989 Germany had to decide on the modernization of short-range missiles, Kohl favored going ahead with the NATO modernization program, but Genscher dug in his heels and modernization was scrapped.

As a counterweight to Genscher and his minions at the Foreign Ministry, Kohl established his close associate, Horst Teltschik, as his national security adviser in the Chancellery, sending a clear message that ultimately this was where German foreign policy would be made.

The nature of the Kohl–Genscher relationship is illustrated by their respective books — mainly that they have very little to say about each other. In 1995 Genscher published his mammoth memoirs, *Erinnerungen*, which Foreign Ministry officials had the grim duty of learning by heart (the honest

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ones admit they never quite made it through). In the book, Genscher emerges as the omniscient master strategist who can predict every development months in advance. Kohl's role, on the other hand, is pretty much reduced to signing what he is told by the Foreign Ministry.

By contrast, Kohl in his book carefully avoids addressing major policy differences between himself and his foreign minister. Indeed, he does not mention Genscher at all, except when it is absolutely unavoidable, limiting himself to a few veiled remarks about his foreign minister's prima donna complex.

Of all Kohl's battles, his fight with former President Richard von Weizsaecker, whose relations with Kohl go all the way back to the days in the Rhineland-Palatinate, has been the most discrete. Von Weizsaecker owes his whole career to Kohl, becoming mayor of Berlin from 1981 to 1984, and later president of the Bundesrepublik from 1984 to 1994.

The two were continually engaged in a kind of political shadow boxing. In Germany, the presidency is largely ceremonial. The patrician and eloquent von Weizsaecker over the years developed the role into a strong platform for moral leadership, becoming the nation's conscience, so to speak. He spoke movingly about Germany's special responsibility after World War II.

But there were certain differences between Kohl and von Weizsaecker. Von Weizsaecker was always more nationalist than Atlanticist, more skeptical about the United States, preferring a European option for Germany. Richard Burt notes, "Particularly during the missile debate, von Weizsaecker was a little 'wobbly,' to use Margaret Thatcher's term. I doubt if von Weizsaecker had been chancellor, he would have seen the missile deployments through."

Toward the end of his term in office, in 1992, von Weizsaecker got carried a little too far in his lofty idealism, overstepping the bounds of the presidency. He took to writing about the sordid rough-and-tumble of everyday politics. "I am convinced," he wrote, "that our state is dominated by two things: the hunger for power to achieve election victory and the hunger for power in the political leadership task of implementing content and concept," comments that were clearly aimed at Kohl.

On another occasion, von Weizsaecker acidly spoke of career politicians as "generalists with a special knowledge of how one destroys political opponents." Again the target of this comment was never in doubt; "generalist" was one of the words Kohl frequently used to describe himself.

Why this animosity, which some might call ingratitude? Probably it had something to do with class. Says Burt, "I know von Weizsaecker had people around him constantly telling him he should be chancellor rather than this oaf from the Palatinate, that he was really the symbol of the greatness of his country. Kohl made von Weizsaecker. What does von Weizsaecker do in return but quietly piss on Helmut Kohl. I think he saw Kohl as a mediocre intellect and as a kind of crass politician, and I think his mistake was that he let people know that, and it got back to Kohl."

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Though Kohl never criticized von Weizsaecker in public during the latter's time in office, von Weizsaecker's sniping, according to close Kohl associates, did not sit well with the chancellor, and along the way the two ceased to be on speaking terms, only addressing each other when absolutely necessary. The Social Democrats, of course, did their utmost to exploit the differences between Kohl and von Weizsaecker.

Kohl or chaos

With friends like these, one might well ask, did Kohl really need enemies? But of course they existed on the other side of the political spectrum, too. In particular, Kohl did not think much of academic types with cushy state sector jobs, people who joined the Social Democrats out of self-interest more than devotion to the workers' struggle. However, despite the youthful brawls and Kohl's famous battle cry from the 1976 election campaign that he would fight the Social Democrats "on land, on water, and in the air," he was well aware that in a country with a history like Germany's, political discourse had to be kept within civilized boundaries.

Throughout his career, Kohl had cordial relations with many leading Social Democrats. As prime minister of the Rhineland-Palatinate, Kohl once sent his friend, the mayor of Bremen, a case of Rhine wine with a small card attached to the effect that since the Social Democrats seemed to have little idea how to handle money, Germans might as well get used to the idea of going back to the old barter system.

During most of his period in office, however, Kohl was blessed with an opposition in tatters, much like the Labour Party in Britain during the Thatcher era. Though not quite as colorful as the British Labour Party (and with considerably better dental work), the Social Democrats for a long time seemed bent on self-destruction.

Having beaten the mild-mannered Hans-Jochen Vogel in the 1983 election, Kohl won again in 1987. By the previous year, Kohl had wiped out inflation, and for the first time in 27 years, prices fell. The election itself was a less than brilliant performance, and Kohl squeezed by with a narrow margin. He could thank a particularly inept opposition for helping to make that possible.

Kohl's 1987 opponent was Johannes Rau, the prime minister of North Rhine Westphalia, a "feel-good" Social Democrat whose selection as candidate was an attempt on the part of the party to project a more moderate and avuncular image. Rau was a member of the Evangelical Church Council and read the Bible every morning, which earned him the nickname Brother Johannes. He wore a Helmut Schmidt–type skipper's cap throughout the campaign to signal his moderate credentials. Still, Rau could not paper over the deep fissures in the Social Democrats between the more moderate camp

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and Oskar Lafontaine's more radical left wing on issues such as NATO and the relationship with the United States.

Some Social Democrats thought they had a chance of gaining power in 1987 by forming an alliance with the Greens. Rau, to his credit, opposed this alliance, though his party's Lafontaine wing lambasted him for his opposition to teaming up with the Greens. At the same time, the Greens were steering further left, coming up with proposals to legalize sex between adults and children and offering free karate lessons to women.

Throughout Kohl's years in office, his steadiness, imperturbability, and optimism were the key factors in his winning. Invariably, Kohl slumped in midterm, and his party lost important state elections as Germans grumbled about this and that, and why didn't the government do something about it. Yet, when it came to the actual decision in federal elections on who should run Germany, four times the voters cast their support behind Kohl. The more alarmist the opposition sounded — the more they raved about the manifold impending catastrophes threatening Germany — the more trustworthy and father-like Kohl looked. This made it seem like a choice of Kohl or chaos, which suited Kohl just fine.

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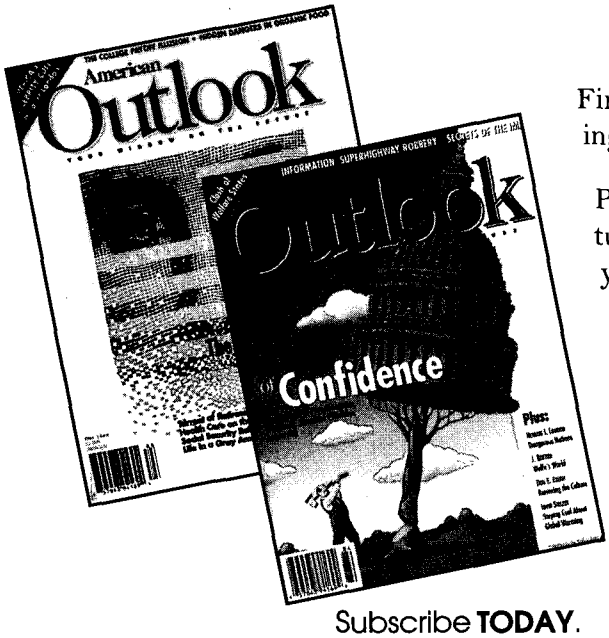

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A User's Guide To Politics

By HERBERT E. MEYER

ONE REASON READING HISTORY is so much fun is that, every so often, you stumble across a minor character who captures your fancy. Not one of the giants who changed the world, but rather someone who, notwithstanding little impact in the scheme of things, said or did something with such charm and style that you can't help but fall for him. For me, one of these minor characters is King Alfonso X of Spain. He ruled in the thirteenth century, and as best we know he did a fairly decent job — modest economic growth, no major wars, no bimbo eruptions. But what captured my fancy is something he is reputed to have said: "Had I been present at the creation I would have given some useful hints for the better ordering of the universe."

It's an irresistible line of thought, for if there is one thing about which we all agree, it is that the universe is less than perfect. Of course, one oughtn't be too critical of every little imperfection; when you do a big job in six days, there are bound to be a few things that could have used a bit more attention.

But had I been present at the creation, there is one imperfection I'm sure I would have noticed and about which I would have made a huge fuss: He forgot to put in the operator's manual. I'm not talking about the glossy, two-page, read-this-before-opening brochure. I'm talking about the fat technical manual that shows how everything is wired together, what is connected to what, which switches and drivers make this or that happen, or keep this or that from happening. How anyone can create something as complex as the universe and then forget the operator's manual is something I just cannot understand.

Because of this oversight, we humans have had to spend huge amounts of

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time and energy figuring out how it all works — so to speak, writing the operator's manual as we go. Indeed, for centuries it didn't seem to occur to anyone that the universe was capable of being understood. When that thought finally struck, progress at first came very slowly. Through the next several centuries, our cumulative knowledge remained so small that an educated person actually knew all that was known. But from roughly the early nineteenth century forward, the amount of knowledge started to increase so rapidly that it became impossible even for a genius to know it all.

Hard and soft sciences

KNOWLEDGE SEPARATED into its various disciplines, for which the generally accepted word is "science." There developed what we now call the hard sciences, such as biology (the study of plants and animals), chemistry (the composition and properties of substances) and physics (the study of matter and energy). As the volume of knowledge grew in the hard sciences, it became impossible for anyone to know everything about even one of these disciplines. So they began to split into smaller, more manageable specialties. Today there is no such thing as a biologist or a physicist, but rather cell biologists and evolutionary biologists, geo-physicists, plasma physicists and astro-physicists, organic and inorganic chemists, and so on — and on.

There also developed what are called the soft sciences. Chief among these is economics (the creation and distribution of wealth, and the production of goods and services). There is also, of course, the one to which so many of us have devoted so much of our lives, politics — the study of the relationship between the individual and the state, and of the relationships among states. Just as with the hard sciences, these two have split into specialties. Today there are economists who focus on trade and those who focus on corporate finance. In politics some people are urban specialists, some domestic-policy specialists, and some international or national-security specialists.

It has recently been estimated that today we are learning so much, so fast, that the total amount of human knowledge is doubling every five years. This leads to a very interesting question: As we approach the end of the twentieth century, how much do we really know? The crucial word here is "know." In this context of "understanding how things work" — as opposed to an anecdotal context such as knowing how many moons surround Jupiter, the year in which the Declaration of Independence was written, or the name of the current secretary general of the United Nations — when we say we "know" something we have a very specific meaning in mind. We mean that this particular bit of knowledge about how things work not only is true, but also is *understood and accepted as true* as part of a shared body of understanding. Of course there will always be disputes and disagreements among experts in any field. But these are at the margin, and they revolve around whatever

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seems likely to be the next bit of knowledge to drop into place; so to speak, the next piece of the puzzle that can be made to fit correctly into an ever-growing, ever-more-accurate picture of how things really work.

About the hard sciences, we "know" quite a bit. For example, we know that all living matter is comprised of cells, that our atmosphere is comprised of oxygen and other elements, and that the planets revolve around the sun. These are accepted and acknowledged insights, no longer in dispute. You don't go to Stanford University to study the chemistry of oxidation but to Harvard if you want to learn how phlogiston figures into the phenomenon. Chemists the world over agree that water is made of up two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. They teach it the same way in Shanghai and in Los Angeles. Physics students throughout the world learn that the planets revolve around the sun and not that the sun revolves around the planets. Indeed, we know so much now about the hard sciences that Nobel Prize winners concede even they cannot stay abreast of all new knowledge in their own specialties.

Human nature is unique; it will never be possible to predict how people will respond.

Not surprisingly, we know less about the soft sciences than we do about the hard sciences. Human nature is unique, which means it will never be possible to predict how people will respond to a given set of circumstances with the same precision or certainty as we can predict how planets, or atoms, or even single cells will respond. So there always will be a fundamental difference between what it is possible to know about a discipline like physics and one like economics or politics. Still, after centuries of experience we ought to have learned *something* about how the practical, everyday world works that would enable us to predict behavior at least to some useful and accurate degree. And indeed we have. In economics, for example, we know that if supply remains the same and demand increases, prices rise; that when supply increases and demand remains the same, prices drop — the law of supply and demand. We have Say's Law, which holds that supply creates its own demand. And with the exception of a few nitwit Marxists, we know that a market economy does a better job of producing and distributing goods and services than does a command economy.

Political insights

So what do we know about politics? I suggest that the correct answer is: *We don't know what we know about politics.* Because we have never taken the trouble to codify what we know about politics — to bring it all together into a coherent, shared body of knowledge — we literally don't know what we know.

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To be sure, I think that I know one or two things about politics. For example: *The stronger a country is militarily, and the more willing it is to use force to defend itself, the less likely is that country to be attacked.* And: *When economic times are good, people will tend to re-elect incumbents rather than replace them with challengers.* No doubt many readers know a lot about politics, and could write out far more laws and axioms than I can. It may even be that some of what I know, and some of what you know, is the same. Or it may be that you think whatever I know is "wrong," and have your own sets of laws and axioms that contradict mine.

With no accepted body of knowledge to guide us, each of us is left to work out our own set of axioms. And because we tend to do this implicitly rather than explicitly — if indeed we do it at all — usually we don't even know whether our own grasp of how things work matches the grasp of those with whom we are dealing. If we find out at all, it is through the experience of working together and arguing about this or that issue. Generally, when we say that we "agree" about politics, we mean that a common understanding of how things work shapes our views on issues. Mind you, this doesn't mean we agree on every issue; merely that we reached our positions by traveling down the same intellectual track. When we find ourselves on different tracks, we have no way to resolve which one of us is heading in the right direction and which one is lost. Anyone seeking to learn about politics, or to reach an opinion about one or another specific issue, must start from scratch; there is no one source to which he or she may turn to learn whatever laws or axioms have been developed and which may be relevant and useful in a particular case.

With no accepted body of knowledge to guide us, each of us is left to work out our own set of axioms.

The fault lies in the culture of our discipline. In the hard sciences, the overriding objective is to develop new insights into how things work. Despite the ferocious competition that marks their daily work, hard scientists all seem to share an insatiable curiosity, an extraordinary sense of enthusiasm, above all an overriding feeling of purpose. What drives them forward is precisely this hope of adding one more piece to the puzzle, of coming one step closer to a genuine understanding of how things work. Thus in the end they celebrate any individual's triumph as a victory for the entire enterprise. When a new insight is shown to be true, that insight is accepted by scientists — embraced, actually — along with the individual who figured it out. And when an insight later is shown to be false, it is discarded — quickly, brutally, and often accompanied by the careers of those who developed it and who continued to defend it after its falsity had become apparent. This attitude among hard scientists — this spirit of collaboration — gives rise to what the great scientist and writer Jacob Bronowski calls a

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sense of the future, a driving optimism that comes from the faith that things can and will get better because honorable people are working together, to learn and to share a growing body of knowledge, for the sheer pleasure and triumph of getting it right.

What happens next is crucial. Once scientists develop and accept an insight, that insight moves into the practical world. Applied scientists at pharmaceutical companies develop new drugs such as Prozac, for example, while their counterparts at engineering companies invent machines such as microwave ovens and MRIs. Entrepreneurs now move in to bring these products to market. Meanwhile, the scientists' insights make their way — fairly rapidly — into the minds of ordinary people. It happens through school science courses designed explicitly to teach these basic insights and, increasingly, through the popular culture. You can learn quite a bit of physics watching *Star Trek* reruns. Of course most people don't learn enough to accurately explain Einstein's theory of relativity, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, or precisely how DNA reproduces. But they get the gist of it, and that is really all they need.

The competitive spirit

THE KEY DIFFERENCE between political science and the hard sciences isn't so much structural as attitudinal. At the top end, we have professional political scientists, most of whom teach at universities and do fundamental research into the relationship between the individual and the state and the relationships among states. Then — our equivalent of applied scientists — come those of us who might be termed political intellectuals and activists. We think and write about politics, and sometimes we jump in and actually participate through appointment to government positions or on campaign staffs. Finally — our rough equivalent of the entrepreneurs — come those of us who go out, get ourselves elected, and actually make the decisions that set policies.

But, unlike our hard-scientist counterparts, we see ourselves more as competitors than collaborators. Our objective isn't to add one more piece to the puzzle; rather, it is to push forward our own perceptions and viewpoints. Political scientists conduct their research, publish their books and essays — but they never resolve their differences, and thus they fail to create a shared body of knowledge. Of course some political scientists do marvelous work and do indeed develop accurate insights. Often they rely on the writings of our very best historians, whose research can provide a deep understanding of why certain things do or don't happen in a given set of circumstances. But nowhere does the profession separate true insights from false ones. Each political scientist does his or her own thing, the good ones and the bad ones working side by side, often sullenly, without the sense of shared enterprise that is so striking among the hard scientists.

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This competitive spirit also drives those of us who are political intellectuals and activists. Our objective is to win acceptance of our own policy prescriptions or political strategies, which are based on whatever insights we may have developed from our personal study and experience. For us there is no such thing as a discredited idea or insight; there are only varying perceptions and realities. We too never settle any argument about the fundamental nature of politics once and for all. In our part of the business, the price of being wrong is — well, there rarely *is* a price to be paid for being wrong. You simply set up shop at another think tank, publishing house, or talk show whose staff is receptive to your own perceptions and opinions. Those whom history and experience prove wrong continue to joust with those who were proved right, the credibility of the former not the slightest bit tarnished. Perhaps because in politics our very subject is power itself, we see ourselves only as competitors, never as colleagues in a shared enterprise.

And as for those of us who try to get elected — the entrepreneurs of politics, if you will — the trick is to claim credit for whatever has gone right and to blame your opponent for whatever has gone wrong, regardless of who or what specific policies may really be responsible. For instance, President Clinton likes to claim credit for the country's booming economy. This sort of thing may succeed in persuading enough voters to win an election, but it also leaves voters utterly confused about how things really work and why certain things really happen.

The lessons of history

BECAUSE THERE IS no codified body of political knowledge, it cannot be universally taught. Two students taking the same political science course at different colleges — or even at the same college but taught by different instructors — can come away with a wholly different understanding of how things work. The intellectual waters are so muddy that at the high school level, where the faculty's objective quite understandably is to get through the curriculum without engaging in professional combat, instructors are loath to wade in. Even in those schools not infected with the virus of political correctness, there is a tendency to shy away from insights.

In my own children's high school, for instance, teachers happen to do an excellent job covering European and American history. The textbooks they use seem accurate and non-ideological — even those chapters dealing with such politically charged events as the Cold War. The kids learn a lot of facts — for which I am grateful. But never are my children taught the *lessons* of history, merely the chronology and the leading players. So they emerge knowing everything about, say, World War II — except what they ought to have learned from it: *Genocidal killers will keep killing until you stop them by force, and they won't limit the killing to their own citizens. The sooner*

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you take them on, and take them out, the fewer casualties will be required. They study all the major wars our country has fought this century — World Wars I and II, the Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf War — but somehow don't come away from their efforts with a grasp of the most important point of all: *A war isn't over until the government that started it ceases to exist.*

All this leaves the students — who soon become voters — utterly confused. Because they don't know how things work, they have no way of judging which of our politicians' policy proposals make sense and which do not. After all, they say to themselves, if the experts can't sort things out among themselves, how can we? *Ask people to make a decision about something they don't understand, and they will respond with anger, frustration, and a powerful tendency to avoid making that decision.* The results are quite predictable. A growing percentage of citizens are tuning out, declining to vote. Moreover, a growing percentage of citizens who do vote are anxious, angry, and frustrated because they feel they are being asked to make decisions that will affect their lives but about which they don't know enough. Increasingly, "serious" politicians who try to appeal for votes with policies based on a rational, "technical" grasp of how things work are finding that fewer and fewer voters have a clue as to what these politicians are talking about. Meanwhile, other politicians — aware of the voters' lack of knowledge and not at all bothered by it — are discovering how to win by appealing for votes with policies that make no sense, or are actually dangerous. And, increasingly, politicians are learning they can win by focusing their campaigns on matters not relevant to how things work, such as their own personalities or what amount to offers of bribes.

Those whom history proves wrong continue to joust with those proved right.

We need to fix this. In the past few years our country has become an increasingly complex piece of social machinery. Thanks to the white-hot pace of technological innovation, entire industries die off and wholly new ones emerge at an unprecedented rate. People change jobs more often than ever. Today more businesses are operating than ever before, and they are creating a wider range of products and services. In the stock markets more shares trade each day than used to trade in a month. Meanwhile, at every level, the size of government itself has grown, along with the breadth and volume of laws and regulations. Both within the country and throughout the world, our political and economic relationships now are more varied than ever. And because we are the world's only superpower, trouble anywhere tends to land on our doorstep; in every instance we wind up deciding whether or not to intervene, and if so how best to do it. In short, today we make more political decisions than ever, and we make them faster. And the

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cost of making a wrong decision keeps rising.

We are going to be in a lot of trouble if voters don't really understand how things work. Mind you, the problem isn't a disagreement over the general direction in which the country should go. That is what elections ought to be about. And within limits, a complex society like ours can change course fairly smoothly, for instance moving from left to right, or from the right toward the center. Rather, the problem lies in making political choices that are beyond the tolerance levels of a modern and complex society like ours — choices that could, in the long run, put us into a national nose dive.

An operator's manual

THE SUREST WAY to avoid this kind of disaster would be to provide voters with an operator's manual — one that offers a general understanding of how things work in politics: of how the relationship functions between the individual and the state, and how relationships function between states. So, for instance, if the day's issue is why the U.S. should throw its weight behind forces for democracy in one or another unstable country, voters might find it useful to know that *Democracies rarely, if ever, start wars. Hence the more democracies in a region the less likely is fighting to break out.* Or, if we are trying to help stabilize the situation in Russia or Indonesia, voters need to understand that *Establishment and maintenance of the rule of law are crucial to stability. Countries that fail to establish a legal system, or that abandon their legal system, are on the road to upheaval and disaster.*

Should one of our political parties be campaigning on a platform to boost the tax rates of those with high-level incomes, it would be helpful for voters to be reminded that *You cannot make the poor rich by making the rich poor.* When the issue of quotas is up for a vote, it would be useful to remember that *Equal opportunity leads invariably to unequal outcomes. If you want equal outcomes, since you really cannot elevate those with less drive and ability, you must forcibly lower those with more drive and ability.* And when some politician caught in a lie complains about the press that exposed him, voters need to remember that *A free press is vital to the survival of any democracy.* But when that press starts to filter its reporting to support the ideologies of its own reporters, voters must also know how dangerous this is because *In a democracy the press functions like the instrument panel in a jet; if the instruments give false readings, the pilots can make rational decisions that result in catastrophe.*

And so forth. Of course these examples are not the only ones, or necessarily the best ones or even wholly accurate; they may need to be modified or even junked entirely. Their purpose is merely to illustrate the kinds of things about politics that people will need to know to make intelligent decisions.

I readily acknowledge — once again — the inherent limit to how far we

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can go. We are dealing with human beings, so it will never be possible to predict their behavior as accurately and precisely as hard scientists can predict the behavior of cells, atoms, or planets. Politics is not biology; people are not lab rats. Perhaps this inherent limit to how much we will ever be able to know is what has discouraged us so far from even trying to codify our knowledge. But just because we can never know everything doesn't mean we should be satisfied with knowing nothing. If indeed it is possible to learn about politics, then after so many centuries of experience we must know quite a bit.

We need not leave this to the political scientists. There is no reason whatsoever why those of us who are political intellectuals and activists cannot do the job, or at least make a start. In cases where we decide we need more evidence, like our colleagues in the hard sciences we can structure "experiments" that will test our theses and tell us, with as much certainty as we reasonably can expect, which are correct and which are false. Of course, when we do embark on this sort of process it's inevitable that some of us will get answers we won't like. That is the risk each of us must be willing to take.

However we proceed, surely this is the next great task for those of us who are involved in public affairs. As we embark upon this project, we should look to the hard sciences for guidance — the reliance on experiment and observation, the willingness to accept what works and to set aside that which is proved not to work, the fundamental good will and spirit of collaboration among scientists who consider themselves embarked on an enterprise of discovery and genuine understanding.

My guess is that, because we really do know so much, once we start the job we will be amazed at how far we are able to go, and how swiftly we can get there. It's hard to imagine a more useful project with which to launch the next millennium, or a more interesting one.

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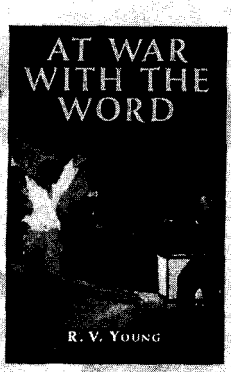

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Money and Politics

By TOD LINDBERG

ELIZABETH DREW. *The Corruption of American Politics: What Went Wrong and Why.* BIRCH LANE PRESS. 278 PAGES. $21.95

Is AMERICAN POLITICS corrupt? Those who raise the issue usually think it is, and the reason they think so is money. The specter is a grim one: Vast moneyed interests — corporations, wealthy individuals, single-issue groups — seek to work the political system to their own advantage. Our politicians either eagerly assign themselves as tools of these interests, in order to enrich their campaigns, or soon find themselves the victims of them, targeted for political destruction for hewing an independent line. A political process in which politicians are bought and sold — that is the condition of American governance we are invited to contemplate.

Not, to be sure, that most of those making this accusation are quite willing to pull the trigger. Almost no one names Rep. X, Sens. Y and Z, and administration officials A, B, and C as having been bought and paid for. We do, after all, have laws against bribery, taking illegal gratuities, using your office for personal financial gain or for the personal financial benefit of others, and other forms of corruption in office — as well as corresponding laws aimed at those trying to influence public officials improperly. These are serious crimes. Nor are the laws merely window dressing, the tribute vice pays to virtue in an otherwise corrupt system. From time to time, public officials and private citizens go off to prison for running afoul of them. So in this system supposedly shot through with corruption, where are the specific accusations of corrupt action?

Well, the story goes, these are the kinds of charges that are notoriously difficult to prove — especially those involving a quid pro quo. Corruption rarely takes the form of the explicit promise of a particular vote in exchange for a sackful of cash. It has been 20 years since ABSCAM, the FBI sting operation that caught a handful of U.S. representatives and a senator on videotape reaching such an accommodation. Rather, the corruption of our system, in the view of most of those who say it is corrupt, is a product of the insidiously corrosive effect of money on the political process. If money cannot be shown to buy a specific vote, yea or nay, it can be shown to facilitate access, to obtain its provider a place at the table where his business is settled, to attract attention among many competing demands for the attention of our politicians. This can and does become the functional equivalent of a quid pro quo. It's not

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that everyone is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, provable in a court of law, of crimes of corruption; it's that no one is innocent of corruption.

Or rather, the only ones presumptively innocent are those who stand up to challenge the system. Naturally, in this reckoning, the corrupt system stands ready to resist such challenges.

It's not that everyone is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, provable in a court of law, of crimes of corruption; it's that no one is innocent of corruption.

Heroic efforts to produce reform come to nothing because of the power of money, interest, and guile in defense of the status quo. Meanwhile, or so the story of corruption goes, the American public increasingly tunes politics out, settling instead for the view that the system is corrupt, that both parties are tainted, and that the people are largely powerless to change it. They don't vote, and they don't seem to care, and though they should, the fact that they don't is directly attributable to the cynical and self-interested hijacking of the political system and our government by those moneyed interests.

Such, in the main, is the story Elizabeth Drew tells in her latest book on Washington, *The Corruption of American Politics*. Drew is an estimable observer of the Washington scene, which she has reported on for the *New Yorker* and elsewhere, and in 11 books, since the Nixon administration. It is probably fair to characterize the perspective she brings to her writing as that of a liberal-minded reformer in pursuit of both activist government and "good" government. This makes her sympathies a better fit with the Democratic mainstream, obviously, than with the conservative Republican mainstream, where skepticism about government's ability to solve problems tilts, in her view, all too readily into an anti-government cynicism she loathes. But she can be harsh on Democrats as well (not least, in this case, on President Clinton). Most important, Elizabeth Drew is unusual these days in that she takes Washington seriously and reports on it honestly, rightly finding in the goings-on of the nation's capital material worth trying to record and analyze at greater length and in greater depth than our media culture currently tolerates. Agree or disagree with her analysis, it is food for thought, and she is worth reading for her detailed reportage alone.

The Corruption of American Politics begins with the post-Watergate campaign finance reforms of 1974 and proceeds to describe the succeeding 25 years as a systematic effort to undo their good intentions by means fair and foul. Drew describes the oppressive money-grubbing required of all politicians and the culture of contributions among the lobbyists and others whose business it is to influence them. She chronicles the growing importance of "soft money," the large contributions individuals, corporations, labor unions, and other organizations are allowed to

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make to political parties, thus circumventing the legal limits on giving to individual campaigns. She tells the tale of the rise of "independent expenditures," the vast and unrestricted sums spent by outside groups on "voter education" ads in fact designed to benefit one candidate over another.

At the center of her book is the story of the frustrating hearings into 1996 campaign finance conducted by Sen. Fred Thompson and the failure of the 106th Congress to enact campaign finance reform despite majority support in both chambers of Congress. In Drew's telling, it's the story of special interests uniting to defeat the public interest. A sub-theme here is the growing partisan rancor of Washington, itself largely a product of the demands that narrow interest groups make on the political parties. This partisanship, in Drew's view, reached its culmination (at least to date) in the impeachment of President Clinton.

Now, it would take the chief K Street lobbyist for Old Nick himself to defend our current system of campaign finance and money politics as models of good governance. At the same time, however, we ought to be careful. There are many currents in Washington politics. Money is surely one of them. But it is not the only one. An exclusive focus on "corruption" of this sort can lead to a distorted perspective on how Washington works.

LET US GRANT that people often operate from low motives. This point Drew amply proves, if indeed it needed further proving. She quotes more than a few unsavory lobbyist types describing (anonymously, of course) how they have successfully manipulated the system. And it is surely also true that elected officeholders have to spend a vast amount of time raising money, mainly in the form of "hard money" campaign contributions of $1,000 or less. Likewise, the other ways in which a politician expects people with money to do good works now include such familiar displays of respect and affection as contributing to the politician's "leadership PAC," as well as such exotica as endowing university chairs in the name of the politician, or buying expensive tables at the politician's spouse's favorite charity dinner. Arm-twisting? Surely. One pays to play.

Likewise, it is not hard to point to evidence of the way in which money buys access and influence, this side of bribery. One may begin with the particularly egregious conduct that has been the specialty of the Clinton White House in this as in so many other areas: the overnights in the Lincoln bedroom, the coffees in the map room, all for large contributors. It is possible that these or other activities crossed the threshold into criminality as laid out in our current laws (we will never know, since there will never be an investigation sufficiently credible to settle the question). But whether they did or not, the notion that a lobbyist should contribute $5,000 from his PAC to attend a golf outing with influential senators is thoroughly familiar to and accepted by both parties, as well as all lobbyists and their clients, too.

This is the "corruption" Drew and others lament. And yet. Have we really taken so long a leap from representative democracy, fair play, and the pursuit of the public interest? Are the parties and the politicians really so "for

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sale" as all that? Is American government by implication no more than a sham republic in which the supposed representatives of the people are in truth a fig leaf for the plutocrats?

Not exactly. Consider a couple of notorious examples (notorious, that is, in the minds of members of each party as they contemplate the other): The tobacco companies give a lot of money, mostly to Republicans; trial lawyers give a lot of money, mostly to Democrats. OK: But why that way and not the other way around? Why didn't the trial lawyers seek their fortune with Republicans and the tobacco companies with Democrats? More to the point, if you are in the business of buying political parties to do your bidding, wouldn't it be prudent to buy both of them? Is it just that the tobacco companies ran out of money buying up the Republican Party and the lawyers ran out making the Democrats a wholly owned subsidiary?

Of course it isn't. It's that the Democratic Party isn't for sale to Big Tobacco nor the GOP to the plaintiff's bar. The chief justification of the contingency-fee arrangements that have enriched trial lawyers is that they ensure that everyone has access to the courts when they believe they have been injured, whether they can afford a lawyer or not. This argument finds a natural affinity with the orthodox Democratic view on equality — making sure the rich are not the only ones who can enjoy the fruit of the system. Likewise, Republicans have a tendency to speak up for business interests, and also generally see such things as smoking (and diet, exercise, what kind of car to drive, etc.) as matters of personal liberty, not of grave social consequence. They are accordingly more inclined to give a hearing to arguments of the kind the tobacco companies make.

The essential fallacy of the "corruption" argument is this assumption: Because one has a particular reason to take a position (namely, the contributions one receives), one has that single reason only. But Washington isn't that mercenary. Ideas, principles, and ideological orientation matter.

They also attract money. But the ideas usually come first. As recently as 1996, Microsoft was just a giant corporation making money hand over fist, paying little attention to Washington. Then came trouble with the Justice Department on antitrust grounds. Microsoft naturally sought, found, and perhaps funded allies who took a dim view of the utility of such antitrust actions. Microsoft did not create the political sentiment.

What about the cases in which members of Congress with no particular history of involvement in a given issue nonetheless hew to the party line — which happens to correspond to contributions to the party? This is, of course, a common phenomenon. But it, too, is less mercenary than it appears. The phenomenon in question is the practice of coalition politics. The idea, from the politician's point of view, is to assemble a coalition of disparate groups that collectively will help create an electoral majority. When possible, a politician accommodates the wishes of members of the coalition, whether he has a personal stake in their agenda or not — for the general good of the party. This is not so much prostitution as it is political strategy.

Drew worries that coalition members will hijack a party and the political

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process, forcing it in a direction opposed by a more general public interest. She sees this phenomenon underlying President Clinton's impeachment: The "Christian right" demanded that Clinton be impeached, and lo, Republicans impeached Clinton. Individual members who were not themselves true-believer Clinton-haters acted out of fear that if they voted against impeachment, they might face disagreeable and expensive primary challenges from the right.

It is certainly easy to see why a partisan Democrat would want to call this "corruption," since it suggests that the majority House vote for two articles of impeachment was illegitimate. But it is hard to understand why anyone else should see it as "corrupt." Of course the conservative wing of the Republican Party — the term "Christian right" is a tendentious and inaccurate Democratic characterization — pressed for impeachment. Some of its members did indeed threaten all manner of reprisals for deviation. But how credible these threats might be, here and in numerous other areas in which special interests threaten reprisal, is a subject Drew does not explore in any detail; she generally deems it sufficient to note that someone has made a threat. Even supposing that these threats were credible and did indeed sway some members (as opposed to the unexplored possibility that members might find it convenient to accuse others of voting out of political necessity, not conscience), what exactly is the non-corrupt alternative? Members of Congress reaching their decisions on matters of great and minor public import without any hindrance from political pressure, whether moneyed or otherwise?

The determinist view that money buys politicians in our corrupt political culture is, in its way, as naive as the notion that legislating in Washington proceeds with the smooth and orderly disinterestedness described in high school civics texts. Perversely, the views have much in common: The implicit premise of some of our reformers seems to be that if only we could strip away the money — that is, the corruption — our politics would consist of the enlightened interplay of the ideas of reasonable people striving only for the common good. This is utopia — a vision of good politics only slightly more unreal than its dystopic counterpart, namely the perception that our current political system is hopelessly corrupted by money.

The essential fallacy of the "corruption" argument is this assumption: Because one has a particular reason to take a position (namely, the contributions one receives), one has that single reason only.

There is good reason to think that Elizabeth Drew, though hardly she alone, has a rather pristine view of how politics should operate. Consider her rather remarkable assessment of recent occupants of the Oval Office:

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Clinton's failure to lead on campaign finance reform was of a piece with his general failure to lead. And his presidency contributed to the decline of the Office of the President. His wasn't the first presidency to do so, but Clinton's own contribution was substantial and of historical importance. His flawed presidency was another disappointment and added to the cumulative negative impact, coming as it did after the disillusionment caused by the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon over the Vietnam War and Watergate, the disappointment of the Ford and Carter presidencies, the societal divisions of the Reagan presidency (though Reagan himself remained popular). The limited vision of the Bush presidency was another disappointment. That Clinton remained popular during most of his presidency doesn't belie the point.

Good heavens. Here we are the world's sole superpower, the economic engine that kept the world economy afloat during global financial crisis — having won the Cold War; established a liberal regime of world trade; achieved long-term price stability; balanced the federal budget; and, oh yes, having taught modern democractic principles to much of the world, at a minimum by example, often by advocacy, and sometimes during occupation after spilling our own blood in war, for more than 200 years — and to Elizabeth Drew, the story of our recent presidential history is the story of one failure and disappointment after another.

This is the point at which an overactive commitment to a view of "the corruption of American politics" causes a loss of perspective and a failure of judgment. Politics is messy and its practitioners are rarely perfect gents. But those who find in its practice only reason for disillusionment probably needed to lose those illusions anyway.

Monica and Hillary

By Naomi Munson

Joyce Milton. *The First Partner: Hillary Rodham Clinton.* William Morrow & Company. 435 pages. $27.00

Andrew Morton. *Monica's Story.* St. Martin's Press. 288 pages. $24.95

Hillary Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. What is it about them that appealed so strongly to Bill Clinton? Or rather — since the mere presence of two X chromosomes may be all it takes to appeal to the president — what is it about *him* that calls out to their souls? On the face of it, there could hardly be two more diametrically different women.

Just try to picture, for instance: a youthful Hillary Rodham, raised in the

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salt-of-the-earth Midwest, fresh from her triumphant scolding of her elders and betters in that famous Wellesley commencement speech. Picture her, legs and armpits ostentatiously unshaven, taking up a position as a White House intern. Is it possible even to begin to imagine the dogmatic and determinedly dowdy young bluestocking coyly exhibiting so much as one thread of her (no doubt plain white cotton) undergarments to the Leader of the Free World?

One can, of course, all too easily see Ms. Rodham administering to the president one of her well-known lashings of the tongue — berating him for this or that misguided policy and condescendingly showing him the path of true enlightenment. One might even (albeit with something of a shudder) imagine her offering — in the kind of direct and earthy language her generation of women thought they found liberating — to perform for him the act Bill Clinton swears is just this side of adultery. But soulful eye contact? Flirting? Snuggling up in the hallway outside the presidential toilet? Cigars and Altoid mints? Not hardly.

As to Monica Lewinsky, child of L.A. privilege, one would be hard put to imagine her stepping out of her house unaccessorized, let alone going out into the world unwaxed, uncoiffed, or unmade-up. Of course, should the Divine Miss Monica by some miracle have managed to muster the academic success to make it to the hallowed halls of Yale or Oxford, she might happily enough have joined in the fun and games of the young Bill Clinton (as indeed she did with the middle-aged version). But could it have been in her repertoire to forgo the glitz and follow him to the wilds of Arkansas on the strength of a mere conviction that the fellow would be president one day? Or, once ensconced as the first lady of the Razorback State, to exercise the calculation cold enough to turn her adopted state's comfortable corruption to her own advantage in the matter of jobs, campaign funds, and commodities profits? Unlikely in the extreme.

Even in relation to the one obvious commonality of their lives, Bill Clinton, the contrast between the two couldn't be clearer. Hillary is said (by numerous anonymous friends) to love her husband truly, even despite her most recent and most public humiliation. And Monica is said (by herself, on every possible occasion) to have loved the president truly as well — she reportedly has twinges even now, despite his determined campaign to smear her as a liar and a desperate stalker. But my, how these ladies differ in experiencing that love. Perhaps, after all, it depends on what the definition of the word "love" is.

However Hillary defines it, there was never a shred of doubt in anyone's mind, almost from the beginning of their relationship, that she didn't trust her man as far as she could throw him. She even sent her father and brothers down to Arkansas, ostensibly to work in her then-fiancé's congressional campaign, but actually to keep him in line when she suspected (correctly, of course) that he was having a fling with a young volunteer. David Brock, in *The Seduction of Hillary Rodham*, reports that she once hired a private eye to look into Bill's wanderings — a story the White House has never disputed.

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Monica, on the other hand, was snookered early on. She fell for every one of Bill's lies — the more tearfully delivered the better. She believed that he might leave his wife for her someday. She even thought he took her *policy* ideas seriously.

And now we have two books, Joyce Milton's *The First Partner* and Andrew Morton's *Monica's Story*, which fit the pattern of contrast between their subjects very well indeed. It might even be said that each got the book she deserves.

The Milton book on Hillary is about as earnest, heavy-handed, and wonkish a compendium as you could hope to find — filled with nothing much new, and dry as toast into the bargain. Milton's biographical quest, was, of course, hampered by the fact that Hillary herself, along with everyone who knows her well, followed standard operating procedure and declined to cooperate in the project. Milton has attempted to correct the deficit by treating us to some rather tedious historico-political disquisitions on various Communist and radical pies the first lady has had her finger in (i.e., Jessica Mitford, the Black Panthers, the children's rights movement) during the 1960s and beyond. For the most part, though, Milton was left to fall back on such Hillariana as were already available in the public record.

Though it is a less than scintillating read, however, *The First Partner* is not without interest — if only as a comprehensive catalog of the pervasive dishonesty and immorality the Clintons brought with them when they moved into the White House almost seven years ago. For all that it's not really news, there is something to be said for seeing it all tied up in a neat package. It is de rigueur on the left these days to decry the right for its obsessive Hillary-loathing. But here's the problem:

There's Hillary's slick and tricky $99,000 commodities profit — made in a very questionable way, and at the very time she was railing publicly against speculators' "greed." There's Hillary as Arkansas's first lady (and Rose Law Firm honcho), arranging without a qualm for her child's nanny to be declared an employee of — and, thus, paid by — the state. There are the loan principal payments deducted from the Clintons' taxes as interest payments. There's Hillary, shrilly adamant about firing — and publicly smearing — the White House Travel Office staff, as a favor to Clinton money man Harry Thomason. There's Hillary forbidding then-White House Counsel Bernard Nussbaum to allow representatives of the Justice Department to participate in the search of Vince Foster's office after his suicide. There are the Rose billing records, which some believe might have implicated Hillary in bank fraud, which went missing for two years after being subpoenaed. There are the 900 confidential FBI files purloined by a Democratic Party apparatchik said to have been recommended by Hillary for his White House job. And always, when questions arise, there are the evasions, the misdirection, the half-truths, and the outright lies. Above all, there's Hillary spouting feminist dogma, while all the time passionately protecting her husband's "political viability" — and thus her own ability to parlay his success into money, power, and patronage for herself.

If one comes away from *The First*

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Partner once again deeply impressed by Hillary's ample capacity for cheating, hypocrisy, and lies, one emerges from Andrew Morton's *Monica's Story* as from a particularly deep mud puddle. Morton, best known as the amanuensis for the late Princess Diana's sad and sordid tale of her marital woes, brings to Monica's story the same combination of low gossip, gushing partisanship, and superficial psychobabble that made his *Diana: Her True Story* an international best seller. (That the hope of that kind of bestsellerdom — i.e., the big bucks — was clearly behind the choice of Morton in the first place hardly makes the book less repellent.)

Morton's Monica is no Valley Girl bimbette. Her favorite poet is T.S. Eliot, for Pete's sake. Her affair with the president, furthermore, was not just another episode in the squalid Clintonian sexual saga: "It was obvious that here was a fascinating human story of love, betrayal and obsession." And to make Andrew Morton's day, one of the humans involved in that story "exhibited a degree of courage and trust to allow me to delve into the inner recesses of her heart without any editorial control."

And just who inhabits those inner recesses? A young woman riddled with anxiety about her appearance, who insists on viewing her neurotic entanglements as evidence that she is "comfortable" with her "sexuality." A young woman who ascribes Bill Clinton's reluctance to move beyond his preferred non-coital method of sexual congress to discomfort with his own sexuality — and sees that discomfort as the result of his "religious upbringing" (in that notorious bastion of Puritanism, Hot Springs, Ark.). A young woman who swore to her lover that she'd never reveal their affair, and then quite casually shared with numerous girlfriends (even apart from the nefarious Linda Tripp, chief villain of the Morton book) the sordid details of her presidential "relationship." A young woman who still for the life of her cannot understand why everyone made such a big deal about a little thing like lying under oath.

If one comes away from The First Partner *once again deeply impressed by Hillary's ample capacity for cheating, hypocrisy, and lies, one emerges from* Monica's Story *as from a particularly deep mud puddle.*

In short, for all the differences in style and substance, Hillary and Monica have a lot in common. Obviously, they share a certain weakness for that cad, William Jefferson Clinton. But beyond that, though not unrelated to it, they share a distinct character defect: These ladies have no morals.

Though their moral deficits have manifested themselves differently — professionally in Hillary's case, sexually in Monica's — there's no doubt at all the deficits are one and the same. It all comes down to a fairly simple proposi-

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tion: Hillary and Monica want what they want when they want it, and they can't see any earthly reason for not getting it, by hook or by crook.

Ironically, as a proud member of the '60s vanguard of the revolution that threw tradition, taste, and morality on the ash heap of history, to be replaced by nothing more than the conviction that whatever it was they wanted was by definition fine, true, and good, Hillary may be said to be the founder of Monica's feast in this regard. If it turned out that what Hillary wanted was nothing more elevated than money, power, and status, the venality of it all could be (and was, as in most revolutions) disguised by the feminist terms of art — freedom, equality, dignity.

It all comes down to a fairly simple proposition: Hillary and Monica want what they want when they want it.

Poor Monica, on the other hand, with not a political stance remaining to be taken, is left with no more weighty desire than to be comfortable with her sexuality — not to mention the illusion that performing oral sex on the president of the United States as he chats on the phone about Bosnia is an indication of such comfort.

And as to the object of their desire, Bill Clinton. He might be said to meld the ladies' separate aspects into one complete whole: the perfectly amoral man.

The best known thing, perhaps, about Clinton is his voracious desire for sexual gratification — and his recklessness in satisfying it. Long-term and short-term, from the parking lot of his daughter's elementary school to the Oval Office, he's always had something quick and easy on the side. What is less obvious — both because of his congeniality and because the sexual adventurousness seems more scandalous — is the man's cold and utter ruthlessness in pursuit of his ambitions.

So it's no accident that Bill Clinton chose as his life's partner someone willing to do just about anything, including accepting the worst public humiliation known to woman, in exchange for political power. Nor is it coincidence that he chose as his sexual liaison someone willing to do just about anything, including the cigar, in exchange for no more than a rich fantasy life about romancing the world's most powerful man.

Which is not to say, in the case of either of the two women, in exchange for nothing. Hillary got the chance to try to parlay her humiliation into a seat in the United States Senate. Monica got the chance to try to transform her eager ministrations into enduring celebrity. All, in a way, at Bill's expense. As for him, maybe we can say that as his scandal-wracked presidency drew to a close, he got a chance to take a good look at the female side of his nature.

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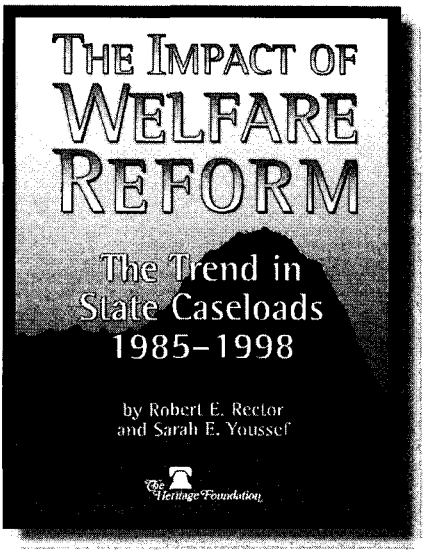

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LETTERS

Living with the Sick Bear

SIR,—Nicholas Eberstadt's "Russia: Too Sick to Matter?" (June/July 1999) is an astute and provocative assessment of Russia's future as a power. Eberstadt's analysis suggests to me strategic implications for the United States and nations on Russia's borders. Men for its armed forces will be fewer. Unless the social system underlying the forces is thoroughly reformed — ceasing the extreme brutality of recruitment — desertions and missing draft calls will increase, while strength and morale will fall. As a result the only reliable units may be the nuclear missile forces and nuclear-suitcase-bomb-carrying *Spetsnaz* special forces. This suggests missile defenses and increased counter-intelligence and anti-terrorist measures. So far we have barely begun building such defenses.

FRANKLIN BROOKE NIHART
McLean, Va.

Impeachment Radicalism

SIR,—Prof. John McGinnis's talents have been profoundly misdirected ("Impeachable Defenses," June/July 1999). I agree with many of the comments he makes in passing, but I do not for a minute believe that there was any moral justification for the assault on the president. I voted for him twice, but with regret, as did many others. I view Whitewater and all that followed from that sordid triviality as the petty bitchiness of people who lost an election and would not accept the result.

I suppose the president lied, but about matters on which he should never, ever have been questioned. The Jones case was itself a scam funded by malicious persons for no purpose other than to put the president under oath to discuss matters personally embarrassing to him. The deposition had no bearing on the disposition of the case, and therefore there was no materiality to anything the president said. Lacking materiality, there could be no perjury. There being no possible perjury, the grand jury was a fraud. It should have indicted, if anyone, the independent counsel. Originalism in the form in which it is advocated by McGinnis is a snare and delusion, but moreover has nothing to do with the impeachment proceedings. If George Washington had concealed his relationship with a strumpet, no one would have thought that a ground for putting him under oath or removing him from office.

I do not favor the constitutional right to an abortion or other causes that McGinnis identifies with the opposition to impeachment. As a lawyer, I am a textualist. And I am appalled by the sexual antics of the president, and by other things that he has done and said. But he was elected by the people because he seemed the best choice offered to them. Those who would remove him from office on account of his private behavior or what he has had to say about that subject would attack

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the basic premise of democratic government, and for no reason better than that they find the present occupant of the office personally distasteful to themselves. That is as close to treason as Mr. Clinton is to perjury.

PAUL D. CARRINGTON
Duke University School of Law
Durham, N.C.

THE AUTHOR RESPONDS,

Professor Carrington chooses to relitigate impeachment rather than respond to the reflections on the legal academy and political structure that were the subject of my article. But I should correct one error of fact. The District of Columbia Circuit on May 26, 1998 held that President Clinton's false statements about his relationship with Ms. Lewinsky were material to the Jones case. And I am surprised that a law professor would declare that independent counsel or indeed any citizen should be indicted without telling us the grounds on which such a charge should lie.

Race and Polemics

SIR,—Michael S. Greve, in his review of William Bowen and Derek Bok's *The Shape of the River* (April/May 1999), writes, "They want permission to discriminate — and yet harangue everyone else for latent racism." This is a case of polemical excess, which often mars the debate on both sides. The authors of this book do not attack opponents of racial preference for "latent racism," and they "harangue" no one. This passage seriously misrepresents the tone and argument of the book. The authors fully respect the good faith of their opponents. I wish Michael S. Greve had done the same.

NATHAN GLAZER
Cambridge, Mass.

Behind the Gingrich Base

SIR;—I read with interest Tod Lindberg's article on Newt Gingrich ("Gingrich Lost and Found," April/May 1999). Lindberg discussed Gingrich as a conservative ideologue, but Gingrich the representative politician has received insufficient attention. Gingrich represented the Sixth District of Georgia (the city of Marietta and Cobb County northwest of Atlanta). It is a suburban *nouveau riche* New South community dominated by a business-oriented conservatism that in many ways borders on libertarianism. Most people are familiar with the area's claims to notoriety: the controversy regarding the "family values" resolution condemning the "homosexual lifestyle" and the resulting boycott of Cobb County during the 1996 Olympic games, and the Gingrich ethics scandal and his subsequent exoneration.

The region also has less publicized distinctions. Cobb County was home to Lester Maddox, segregationist governor of Georgia during the 1960s, who — according to legend — used to chase African-Americans out of his diner with a baseball bat before being elected governor of the state. J.B. Stoner, a white supremacist, who organized bombings of Alabama churches, was also a citizen of Marietta. Marietta, it might be noted, is one of the few Southern cities with both

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Union and Confederate Civil War cemeteries. Cobb County also borders Forsyth County, a center of Klan activity in the mid-1980s. The area today has undergone rapid commercial and residential development and is a thriving business community considerably riven by tensions between natives on the one hand and Northern and Midwestern transplants on the other. Cobb County has become more diverse in recent years, with more African-Americans and an influx of Latinos — though this seems to be primarily related to business factors.

The above is intended to convey the coexistence of vicious prejudice and suburban affluence as the context for the representative aspect of Gingrich's politics. Gingrich's "revolutionary" approach to ideological conservatism needs to be understood with strong reference to the nature of his actual constituency (Southern business conservatives strongly influenced by a nativist strain of libertarianism) and the virulent racism of its recent past.

I am not suggesting a moral equivalence between Gingrich on one hand and the Maddoxes and Stoners on the other, but those who wish their consciences to be clear should know what they might be embracing when they make Gingrich their hero. It is not for me to say to what extent Gingrich was influenced by the more repugnant aspects of his constituency. But informed and intelligent citizens should have an understanding of some of the forces that enabled Gingrich to attain the speakership and may again motivate him, no matter how heroic a figure he is, to many in the Republican Party.

GUY ARCHEA
Topeka, Kansas

THE AUTHOR RESPONDS,

If Guy Archea is, as he says, "not suggesting a moral equivalence" between Newt Gingrich and Lester Maddox's ilk, one wonders what his letter would say if he were. Disclaimers notwithstanding, his letter seems rather clearly an effort to link modern ideological Republicanism with white Southern racism. This is a depressingly familiar line of ad hominem attack on Republicans. To the extent it may be substantive, I would ask, in what sense is it reasonable to take the most extreme view held by anyone in any congressional district and impute it to the representative for that district? Politicians can only fairly be judged by the positions they take, not the positions of those who vote for them. If Guy Archea has anything to offer indicating that Gingrich has appealed to racist sentiment in Cobb County, he doesn't produce it here.

The Military Essence of NATO

SIR,—Bruce Jackson is correct when he says it would be a mistake for the U.S. to disengage from the NATO alliance ("The Conservative Case for NATO," April/May 1999). Such a move would remove an anchor of stability from Europe, thus imperiling American interests there and beyond.

History proves the Atlantic Alliance's success in meeting its original mission: containing Soviet expansion. In doing so, NATO's importance grew to outstrip its original narrow purpose. Today its objective is no less than to secure and expand upon the political

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and security gains made worldwide in the Cold War's wake — surely something upon which both liberals and conservatives can agree.

Yet, success here is far from assured. In NATO's political victories, what is too often obscured is the military essence of the alliance. Here, at the alliance's core, there are steep challenges.

Chief among them is the increasing chasm in the quality of military technology wielded by the U.S. and the rest of the 18 alliance partners. Already military operations undertaken by NATO, such as in Kosovo, have revealed the need to create two tiers of military operations because of the vast U.S. lead in military technology.

At his farewell press conference May 4, the outgoing chairman of NATO's military committee, German Gen. Klaus Naumann, spoke to this point.

He said the U.S. and Europe should harmonize their collective research and development budgets. And Europe must invest in standoff weapons, strategic airlift and combat search and rescue forces, he added.

"These are all things which can be easily done," he said, "and for that you don't need another voluminous conceptual paper [or] a European summit, you need something like the will to decide."

Whatever the achievements of NATO as a political body, its ability to meet with continued success will rest on its credibility as a military alliance. And if its forces can't talk, share data, and fight together as a unified instrument for collective defense, then the alliance's political strength will wither.

Mr. Jackson rightly paraphrases Margaret Thatcher: "Now is not the time to go wobbly on NATO." To ensure that doesn't happen, now is the time to strengthen the military sinews, which provide the alliance with its means to continue achieving political successes.

ERNEST BLAZAR
Lexington Institute
Arlington, Va.

Incomplete Conservatism

SIR,—In your "Conservatism at Century's End" (April/May 1999) you write, "modern ideological conservatism constitutes a completed body of thought."

I wonder. There seem to be unresolved issues still.

Take, for example, drugs. I support current policies on drugs in America (to keep them largely illegal). I think modern ideological conservatism comes out on this side, too. However, I can see how other conservatives may (and do) disagree. Some say liberty implies no drug laws. Others say the costs outweigh the benefits of the war on drugs.

So this policy constitutes a split-hair end of conservative thought. It comes out on both sides.

Also, conservatives are becoming more culturally conservative and with this comes a shift in priorities. It may mean conservatives back government involvement in societal crisis issues (on the side of conservatives). This will discomfit economic conservatives and libertarians who came to the movement because it scrupulously separated the government from the economy and society. This area seems to be incomplete.

STEVEN W. WARDELL
Cambridge, Mass.

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Speaking Up at Boalt Hall

SIR,—Your intent in offering the three Boalt Hall essays ("Diversity on Trial," June/July 1999) is unclear. Surely, there is room for profound philosophical thought on our current distraction with "diversity." Yet budding young law students seem unattuned to such discourse, largely because their elders have let them down.

The foreclosure of free, intelligent expression at our universities is a disgrace. But equally disturbing is the apparent mindset of even these "conservative" students, as they focus on lofty banners like "diversity" instead of the old, proven standards of truth and excellence. As one writer (Joshua Rider) intimates, the mission of law school should be to teach the law, not to engage in race-and-sex posturing. That the latter is so dominant can be traced to the misfeasance of undergraduate schools and our post-1960s cancer of "social causes," a procrustean civil rights mentality smothering our historical constitutionalism.

Instead of concentrating on learning the law of ages, we now rear young people to be their own lawmakers, worrying about "resegregation," "historical inattention to the voices of women and minorities," or "color blindness," none of which 1990s code words lend to higher learning, nor to an understanding of our vast culture.

American culture rightly understood doesn't "glorify the dissenting individual" unless in the crucible of life he is proven to be right. Glorifying Martin

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Luther King Jr. as a pillar of Prop. 209 helps no one when one realizes that he actually endorsed affirmative action, nor does it render him timeless. By the same token, Lincoln's thought on "equality" has been distorted beyond truth. Far from serving as the seeds of sound learning, such inaccuracies only confuse the dialogue. Instead of looking to J.S. Mill, King, Thoreau, or Lincoln, we should look at least to James F. Stephen, Tocqueville, the Founders and beyond for a truer wisdom and vision of self-government. Instead of becoming bogged down in pointless, tiresome "diversity" talk, whether of "race" or sex," we should return to common sense, the common law, honesty, and our own Western heritage — the endless conversation that would teach young students what is really important.

Professors Robert Weissberg and Paul Hollander have pointed out the academic hypocrisy of "tolerating the deviant while condemning Western Civilization." (*Society*, November/December 1998; March/April 1999) Though discrimination is the hallmark of authentic tolerance, our infatuation with "equality" has obviously "abducted the concept of tolerance" to subvert the natural intelligence of young law students. As a result, we now wallow in confused, even fatuous talk of "non-discrimination," even as we face new challenges daily requiring the utmost in discrimination and wise judgment. Instead of being able to rely on a free, civilized people to manage their affairs, we resort to socialistic government. "Hate" crimes are merely Damoclean swords to be wielded by Clintonese functionaries on whomever they choose to condemn.

Our response to such nonsense should be, "Put a sock in it!" Repeal the "non-discrimination." Return to ancient folkways, brotherly love, the Ten Commandments, and Western Civilization. Of course, then professors would have to return to teaching them.

W. Edward Chynoweth
Sanger, Calif.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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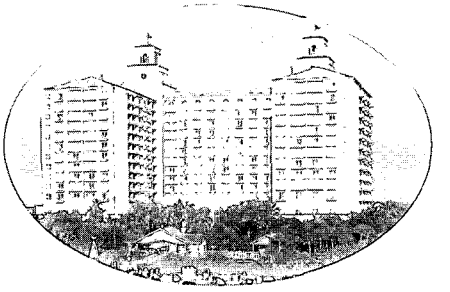

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